

**The Perception of the Public towards the Concept of Secularism in Nepal, its Opportunities  
and Challenges**

**Master Thesis in Religion and Diversity, Conflict and Coexistence**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Regarding social, political, cultural and religious aspects of Nepalese secularism. This study has examined the phenomenon of secularization in Nepal. Following the 2006 democratic revolution; which succeeded the Maoist's decade long armed conflict, the monarchy was dethroned and secularization process began. This thesis gives the contextual background

The only Hindu Kingdom in the world with some 80% of inhabitants as its adherents was officially declared a secular state. The secularization process has since been subjected to various debates and perceptions by the general public and the religious groups. Some have remained in support while some are objected to the idea. It is observed that so far there is no strict separation of state and religion. The Nepalese secularism is near in structure to the Indian model, in which the state upholds all the religious traditions of its people equally, or at least envisions to. Religion is neither a private affair nor is the society secular.

Multiple identities have been seen while religious minorities seek recognition on an equal footing with the majority, and religious and ethnic groups engaged in identity-making processes that have tended to enhance their religious traditions, making sure that they invite the president or prime minister to their new year's festivals, for example. The Hindu Nationals object to the view of multi religious and National identity hence subjecting the concept of secularism to varying perceptions.

This paper examines the various perceptions with regard to secularism and asks the questions like how is secularism perceived; what has been continued and discontinued in the New Nepal, and how the Nepalese secularism relate to the global phenomenon. It is necessary to analyze how the concept can be implemented in a country with a large Hindu majority, where Hinduism and the state have, until very recently, preserved a symbiotic relationship through the institution of Hindu Kingship (Sharma 2002; Toffin 2006). Through qualitative desk research the paper has engaged with various literature on global and Nepalese secularism using theoretical lenses of secularization theory and conspiracy theory among others.

The dissertation is structured in five main chapters. Chapter one; introduction, background with global perspectives of secularism and research problem. Chapter two contains the methodology of the research. Chapter three sketches major theories and concepts used in the project. Chapter four presents the textual data resulting from the research discussion of the themes stemming from the research. Chapter five highlights the main arguments and issues in the entire paper and draws conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

It is observed that the Nepalese secularism has come out of unique background with reference to the global phenomenon although it shares some semblance with the neighboring India. Although the nation was declared secular, the study reveals that the equality envisaged in the constitutional framing is not fully accepted by the majority, and that the state actions are yet to reveal total equality for the minority faith groups. Religion is neither a private affair nor is the society secular. Multiple identities are seen as religious minorities seek recognition on an equal footing with the majority, and religious and ethnic groups engaged in identity-making processes have tended to enhance their religious traditions, making sure that they invite the president or prime minister to their new year's festivals, for example. The Hindu Nationals object to the view of multi religious and National identity hence subjecting the concept of secularism to varying perceptions.

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# **THE PERCEPTION OF THE PUBLIC TOWARDS THE CONCEPT OF SECULARISM IN NEPAL, ITS OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **1.0. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

By definition, secularization is a historical process in which religion loses its social and cultural status in connection to its relationship with and influence on the state, resulting into the role of religion being restricted society; thus faith organizations in the long run are left with little social power and relationship with the state (Rangdrol, 2007). On the other hand, religious nationalism is defined as the promotion or support for an assimilative and homogenizing national identity based on the ethos and culture of a particular religion. In other words, it is the relationship of nationalism in connection to a particular religious belief or affiliation (Paudel, 2019). This paper will highlight the reception of the development of secularism in Nepal by the republic while focusing on the popular religions in the country. This introductory chapter will present the background to the nation and look at how secularism has been adopted, and some of the issues being discussed in the global context with reference to secularism.

#### **1.2 Background to Nepal**

Nepal is a landlocked multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious country, situated north of India in the Himalayas. It is the 49th largest country by population and 93rd largest country by area. It borders China in the north and India in the south, east and west, while Bangladesh is located within only 27 km (17 mi) of its southeastern tip. Nepal has a diverse geography, including plains, subalpine forested hills, and eight of the world's ten tallest mountains, including Mount Everest, the highest point on Earth. Nepal is a multiethnic country with Nepali as the official language. There are 126 castes/ethnic groups, speaking 123 languages. Nepal at present has ten major religious groups (CBS 2012). Despite that the country has had diverse populations, diverse cultures and religions; it has largely remained a Hindu country for almost two centuries.

Government statistics indicate that the vast majority of people in Nepal are Hindu, forming approximately 81.3 per cent of the population. The second largest religious grouping is; the second most popular religion in the country is Buddhism, accounting for 9.04 per cent of the population; Islam is the third, with 4.38 per cent; followed by Kiratis, at 3.04 per cent; at Christianity, at 1.41 per cent (CBS, Statistical Pocketbook Nepal, 2016, June 2017, P33). There are five more that account for less than 1 per cent of the population (ibid, P35). From 1962 Nepal was an official Hindu State since as declared by the then Constitution (Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990 (2047 B.S.), Article 4 (1)) and an unofficial Hindu State before that time. Since 2007 Nepal became a secular since the declaration in the Interim Constitution of Nepal (4Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007 (2063 B.S.) Article 4 (1)), which marked the end of a ten-year-long armed conflict. Year 2006 was significant to Nepal as three things were brought to bear. It marked the transition from civil war to peace; from autocratic monarchy to democracy and from Hinduism to secularism. Secularization was one of the crucial challenges in the drafting process of new constitution in Nepal in 2015 (Rangdrol, 2007).

Generally, since the second half of the 18th century, Nepali rulers have styled themselves and their culturally and ethnically diverse subjects as Hindu, making Hinduism an essential component of national identity. Up to date, the Hindu influence remains a reality in the many systems in the country, including the legal system and everyday institutional practices. Subject to this, there has been little attempt to reform the numerous legal provisions that are inconsistent with secularism (by the western standards) or attempt to reduce the government's interaction with religion (CCD 2009:1). For instance, the state is still involved in the management of trusts associated with Hindu gods and temples; government funds are spent on Hindu religious festivals; cow slaughter and conversion are still outlawed, among others.

Historically, modern Nepal begins after unification of the initial small states into which it was divided, dating back to the 18th century. Those states preserve their own culture and religions (Thapa 2013). The motivation for the unification was the need amalgamate small countries into one that could be strong enough to stand against the Imperial British Empire, which under the East India company was expanding in Indian states. Not only that, but also religious ambitions of



the then King of Gorkha contributed to the unification (Pradhan 2002; Upreti 2010). Having noticed that after Muslim and British rule in India, the country was no longer a pure Hindu state; King Prithvi Narayan Shah envisioned and moved to create a pure-Hindus state in Nepal as early as 1768. He initiated the unification which his successors continued. When the different small states and principalities were brought together, it resulted into Nepal being a country of diverse cultures and religions. However, the state set on a course to build a single national identity by assimilating all diverse groups through a policy of one language and one religion (Gaige 2009; Pradhan and Shrestha 2005). Consequently, the imposition of the policy undermined the religious and cultural freedoms of ethnic and religious minorities who were amalgamated into the unified Nepal (Gaige 2009).

The policy demanded that for one to become a Nepalese citizen, he or she must speak Khas language, accept the caste system, follow the Hindu religion and wear Nepali dress (Gurung 2010). As a result, those of diverse religious groups had to accept Hinduism so as to be considered citizens of the country. State governance machinery was guided by Hindu religion and belief. Laws and Justice were greatly influenced by Hindu caste system up to around 1854 (Thapa 2013). Between 1951 and 1960, Nepal enjoyed a multi-party democracy system, which was suspended in 1960 when King Mahendra suspended the newly elected parliament and imposed a monarchical rule and a system called *Panchayat*. Following this, the year 1962 was characterized by movements and protests and as a result some were flexed and some rights to people were provided. The 1962 constitution allowed all people to practice their religions as inherited from their ancestors. However, Hinduism was regarded as the state religion even in the constitution. The constitution provided for the rights to practice own religion and stated that: “Every person may profess his own religion as handed down from ancient times and may practice it having regard to the traditions” (HMG 1962). These rights were however restrictive in that proselytization was prohibited. It stated: “...Provided that no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another.” (ibid).

In this arrangement breach of the directive was a punishable offence. An attempt to proselytize would attract three years of imprisonment and a successful conversion of another would attract six years of stringent imprisonment. Foreigners would be expelled from the country after

completion of six years of imprisonment. Legal documents of the state were also protective of Hinduism and its followers than was the case with other religious adherents. Fierce opposition was mounted against these principles as well as the general undemocratic governance (Middleton and Schneiderman 2008). This led to some changes taking place. In 1990s first democratic constitution was promulgated. The constitution introduced a multi-party parliamentary system in the country. However, despite that some relief in terms of freedoms was seen, the constitution maintained Hinduism as a State Religion. The State was still declared a Hindu State. The constitution was a product of consensus between the Monarchy and political parties (Lawoti 2005). The constitution made the monarchy ceremonial, but the palace was still powerful. This declaration of Nepal as a Hindu state led to the continued undermining of minority groups and symbolically deemed non-Hindus as second-class citizens (Gurung and Bhandari 1993). By comparison the constitutions of 1962s and 1990 had no special differences with regard to the religious rights of people. The provision of the Hindu Kingdom and Prohibition of conversion remained the same.

Another change of the constitution following peace agreement with Maoists in 2006 came in 2015. The new constitution declared Nepal as secular, democratic, socialism- oriented, federal democratic republican state. From the day of promulgation, this constitution faced criticism as well as applause. The new word "Secularism" that was introduced became a contested term. Hindu activists protested against secularism and demanded that the Hindu kingdom be brought back. The minority religious groups on the other hand had problems with the definition of secularism provided by the state. The state defined secularism as the "protection of religion and culture being practiced since ancient times and religious and cultural freedom," and the Supreme Court of the land interpreted this rendering as affording a special status to Hinduism (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2017). This sentiment signals the presence of growing concerns from several parties on the effectiveness and the status of secularism in effect.

The minority religious groups argue that the constitutional rendering of secularism does not secure their religious rights and freedom adequately. For instance, Christians complain that the constitution does not allow conversion. Although the constitution secures an individual's right to choose religion but, influencing people to change their religion is punishable. It further

condemns missionary activities. National and international Christian organizations have echoed their disappointment regarding the issue. It is also observed that despite the ban on conversion, it has become almost impossible to stop such, which in the end sets religions in tensions and calls against secularism. Some bodies think that their religious activities are restricted due to the way the constitution has been worded with regard to secularism and religious freedoms enshrined. There are also feelings that Hinduism is still favored in the way the laws are applied. For example, they argue against the present constitution's legal protection of the cow which cannot be slaughtered for meat.

It is therefore clear that the constitutional declaration of secularism and the way it has been structured leaves a number of questions and concerns. In line with that, this paper aims at assessing the perception of religions with regard to secularism, its opportunities and challenges for the society. It therefore focuses on the opportunities and challenges that can be seen from people's reactions. Unlike other states in the southern part of Asia like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives and others whose constitutions state that they are religious states, Nepal and India are the only two in the region which are now declared as secular. The country has been under Hindu religious identity, while now this has been pushed aside in favor of secularism. So far, secularism in Nepal has not meant the strict separation of state and religion and appears to be inspired by the Indian model, according to which the state upholds all the religious traditions of its people equally. It neither makes religion a private affair nor society secular. Instead, through secularism, religious minorities seek recognition on an equal footing with the majority, and religious and ethnic groups engaged in identity-making processes have tended to enhance their religious traditions, making sure that they invite the president or prime minister to their new year's festivals, for example. The multiplication of religious festivals in the national calendar and in public space is thus seen as both a secular development and an important symbolic recognition of religious and ethnic minorities.

### **1.3 Brief Global Perspective on Secularism**

Religious nationalism has been often used as a strong factor for political functionality, in many states around the world and throughout history. In a country where religion is dominant, religion becomes an important unifying factor and it drives the political action and interests. Such may be

the case in the countries of the Gulf region for instance. In the southern and Eastern Asian region the dominant religions are Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. In these states, religion is foundational to enhancement of nationalism and is used to increase political grounding and influence action. Examples can be seen in religion-inspired terrorism in Pakistan and elsewhere, affection towards the monks in Sri Lanka, where nationalism inspired by religion is conspicuous. Nepal joined Albania, India and Turkey when it became a secular government, showing that it is not the only state in the region in this status (see Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007; Constitution of Nepal 2015, article 4; The Constitution of Albania 1991, Article 7; The Constitution of India 1950, Preamble; Constitution of Turkey, Article 2 and Constitution of Nepal 2015, article 4). In addition, these countries, especially India are also faced with similar problems in its exercise of religious neutrality, echoing the problems that Nepal is also faced with (Deol, 1996).

The preamble of Indian Constitution, presents it as a secular republic which leans towards a meaning of India being a republic in which there is an equal respect for all religions. The state is under an obligation to respect all religions equally, and treat them non-preferentially. This practice has been developed in a bid to protect religious pluralism. The 45<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill to the Constitution defined this 'secular republic' as a republic in which there is equal respect for all religions. Inserted through 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment (1976), the word—secular—remains undefined as the Council of States did not accept the 45<sup>th</sup> amendment Bill of 1978 which proposed an amendment in Article 366 (definition clause) to provide for the definition of the expression 'secular'. However, Article 25 guarantees every person's freedom of conscience and the right to practice; profess and propagate religion as a matter of fundamental right. This provision mirrors Article 26 of Nepali charter.

Secularism in India has varied perception and the implementation of secularism is not without controversy. Some political candidates seeking political advancements point out "secular" virtues provided in the Indian Constitution and look at secularism in terms of the right "freely to profess, practice and propagate religion," which the Indian constitution clearly provide for (Article 25(1)). When having the majority Hindus in mind politicians refer to the spirit of tolerance toward all religions and it is also claimed to be stated in the constitution. Others may only look at

secularism in terms of equal treatment of religions by the state or the careful involvement with religions on the part of the state. In some instances the Indian politicians argue for an involvement of the government with religions by the government in terms of availing them quotas in educational or political institutions, but this is usually in the confines of the caste and religious affiliations in question. Thus the Indian view of secularism is ambiguous (Stephens 2004, Stephens 2007; Baird, 1993; The Constitution of India 2000). However one can see in the discussions above that the view of secularism centres on state-religion relationship as well as secular virtues as fundamental corners that provide the secular view among the Indian scholars and the public.

Furthermore, since it is generally understood that the main characteristics of secularization can be a decline of religious beliefs as well as practices identified with increasing modernization; privatization of religion; and the enhancement of secular spheres like the state, economy, science (Casanova 1994) the question would be in the case of Nepali transition into secularity, can these trends be traced? If yes to what extent, if not what are the narratives of secularity identifiable in the public and religious debates of this phenomenon and also in comparison to the western view of secularity? Not only that but also what processes identifiable in governmental actions and policies that reveal such trends? The present study would like to engage with such issues, from the perspective of the religious institutions in Nepal, but from a general standpoint. Bearing in mind that European secularism is not uniform; the study will consider some examples, for instances American, French and British versions and perhaps seek to identify the place of Nepalese version of secularism.

For the sake of delimitation this study will be restricted to four religions, namely, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, based on their global ranking.

### **1.3 Research Questions:**

This paper will seek to and answer the following questions:

- How do the Nepali public understand and perceive secularism?

- What are the continuities and discontinuities that Nepal as a secular state shares with its past?
- How does the political, religious and historical contexts of Nepal as a secular state relate to the broader discourse of secularism?

#### **1.4 Purpose Of The Study:**

This study purports to survey the situation of secularism, from the standpoint of religious institutions, and attempt to state the gains and losses that have been incurred in this process of change that the Nepali society has gone through.

#### **1.5 Dissertation Structure**

##### **Chapter One**

This chapter will present the problem/research question which guides the project in terms of research themes as well as what leads to research methodology. The chapter also provides the background and motivation of the research as well as the delimitation. Furthermore, this chapter presents the context of the paper, outlining the Global and local contexts of Secularism. It also includes the context of secularism and its relationship to multi-religious nature of Nepal.

##### **Chapter Two**

Chapter two contains the methodology of the research. It describes the qualitative methodology used in identifying and analyzing textual data. It is about the methodological choices made in order to best answer the overall research question, which helps to produce new and relevant knowledge. The research being qualitative and desk based, content analysis, document analysis and discourse analysis are the main analytical tools that were used in this research.

##### **Chapter Three**

This chapter outlines major theories and concepts used in the project. The said theories and concepts will be defined and operationalized. The theories used in this paper are the conspiracy theory, and the secularization theory. Within the conspiracy theory there are sub theories of religious rejection of secularism and religion and power. The secularism Theory also concentrates on the contextual adaptation of the concept of secularism. The researcher will use theories inductively and relate the textual data in the main discussion.

##### **Chapter Four**

This chapter presents the textual data resulting from the research. The data is presented under main themes extracted on the basis of discourse analysis and relevance to the research questions. This chapter also presents the discussion of the themes stemming from the analysis process. It engages with the findings in order not only to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon, but also to relate the contextual data to the theoretical framework of the research and literature.

## **Chapter Five**

This concluding chapter highlights the main arguments and issues in the entire paper, and draws conclusions thereof. It also puts forward recommendations pertaining to the theme, and suggestions for further studies

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **2.0.METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the paper focuses on methodological approaches that have been adopted in this research. It centers on the broad philosophical grounding of the methods, techniques, tools and data analysis method. It will also highlight the challenges and limitations encountered in the process and the ethical considerations in the process of the research.

In terms of methodological approach, the paper has used a qualitative desk research method. The aim here is to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being investigated, on the perception of secularization in the Nepalese population, and to establish the linkages between the social-political happenings and the interpretation of its effects by the people in their lived experiences. Methodology in research is essential in order to engage in a scientific and systematic study. Normally, methodology tends to provide a description of the approach taken, provide evidential content of the phenomenon being discussed and indicates the types of tools and techniques used during data collection (Cavaye, 1996). The process of the research involves emerging the questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data". (Creswell, 2009:4). Through the chosen method the research will generate a description from the participants, of the approaches used and gain insight how the problems are perceived and analyze how the phenomena has affected the subjects in the research radar.

Research methodology portrays the research process and points to how the research will proceed, the choice of research paradigm that signifies the study one is undertaking. Scholars stipulate that research methodology is meant to be "guided by philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and values and the theoretical framework that informs comprehension, interpretation, choice of literature, and research practice on a given topic." (Bagele 2012: 151). In such a way the research is scientifically undertaken and therefore contributes to a body of exiting scientific knowledge about reality and phenomena.



## 2.2 Research Design

The phenomenon being investigated in the research relates to people's experiences in religious, social and historical contexts. In order to achieve an in-depth apprehension, the paper has used a qualitative research method. The aim here is to achieve a deeper understanding of the mentioned phenomenon and to establish the linkages between the social-political happenings and the interpretation of its effects by the people in their lived experiences. The qualitative approach provides an arena for thorough reflection on this social phenomenon. Through the qualitative method the researcher gains in depth knowledge of the complex social dynamics at play in various programs and processes, in this case the perception of various groups in Nepal, on the matter of secularization as experienced (Yin: 2014).

A qualitative design was relevant because qualitative methods offer ways to gain insights into individual experiences and the construction of meaning (Patton 2002). Qualitative methods are mostly ideal for exploring topics where little is known, making sense of complex situations, gaining new insights into phenomena, constructing themes to explain phenomena, and ultimately fostering a deep understanding of the phenomena (Morse and Richards 2002). As is the case with qualitative research, this paper will adopt methods that are descriptive and interpretative, in order to grasp the subjective meaning of social-political developments (Morse and Richards 2002). This design will grant the researcher the ability to connect between the theories that are chosen and the reality in the Nepalese society, as regards the aftermath of the declaration of Nepal as a secular state, how the development has played out as well as the perceptions of the people of the new reality and the wellbeing of society in comparison to the previous political arrangement where Nepal had a state sponsored religion (Bryman, 2012 and Creswell 2014). Qualitative research method or approach usually emphasizes on 'words rather than quantifications in the collection and analysis of data.' This research strategy uses the inductive approach of the relationship between theory and research, which means theories are created from the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012, p.16).

The design of this research paper is going to be descriptive and interpretive because it is based on review of existing literature and therefore it is a secondary research. It is descriptive research

because it will highlight the development of Secularism status and how different quarters have perceived and applied the declaration and because of the emphasis on the sentiments stated and the connections between the new government social policy and the reality on the ground through lived experiences. This will be achieved by looking at the policy details that the government laid out and intended to achieve and the reality of the situation on the ground by reviewing various works that have been written on secularism and its implementation in Nepal.

It is also interpretive because it will give meaning to the approaches taken by the state in the policy declaration and what could and could not be expected from the same, in order to determine the nature of the reality in the implementation so that lived experiences can be well interpreted. Scholars state that interpretive methodologies are concerned with the meaning-making practices of human actions at the center of scientific explanation. In this case I have conducted this research from an experience-near perspective, and therefore the literature reviewed will be ones that are expressive of the Nepalese experiences and interpretation of the phenomenon. (Bevir and Kedar 2008; Klotz and Lynch 2007).

## **2.1 Data Sources**

### **2.1.1 Secondary Data**

Desk review has been conducted to collect data from various secondary sources. This includes publications by scholars, reviews of government policy documents, newspaper/media searches websites, and other sources on the Nepalese secularism, were considered. The data from these sources were taken into account for the review.

### **2.1.2 Secondary Data Collection Methods**

The secondary data refers to data that was collected by someone other than the user. This data source gives insights of the research area of the current state-of-the-art method. It also makes some sort of research gap that needs to be filled by the researcher. This secondary data sources could be internal and external data sources of information that may cover a wide range of areas. However, in this paper the secondary data was restricted to the ones that discuss the issue of secularism and how Nepalese society, how religious groupings perceive the status. From a

methodological point of view, literature reviews can be comprehended as content analysis, where quantitative and qualitative aspects are mixed to assess structural (descriptive) as well as content criteria (Aaker, Kumar & George, 2000). But in this case this study is grounded in qualitative approach only.

## **2.2 Analytical Methods**

Research methodology is about the method, processes and the procedures used in the course of a research. This is about steps, guidelines and tools used in the research study. It is the outline or framework of the research study, undertaken when doing research

### **2.2.1 Content Analysis**

While content analysis was mainly used as a quantitative methodology, in recent times the methodology was employed in qualitative health studies and since then, the potential of content analysis as a method of qualitative analysis many researches has been recognized, leading to its increased usage and popularity (Nandy & Sarvela, 1997). Qualitative content analysis is one of numerous research methods that are employed to analyze text data. Qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (Lindkvist, 1981; Tesch, 1990). It is an interpretive exercise. Text data in this case applies to verbal, print, or electronic data forms. It is flexible in that the sources of the data can have been obtained from narrative responses, survey questions, interviews, focus groups, observations, or print media such as articles, books, or manuals (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). This essay will mainly be based on print data in form of articles, books and manuals.

Qualitative content analysis involves intensely examining language in order to classify large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings (Weber, 1990). The research at hand will generate themes through reviewing and comparing of the available publications in order to establish the meanings and the applicability of the texts to the phenomenon being studied. The ultimate goal of content analysis is “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). In this article, qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data. Scholars using qualitative content analysis can use various approaches that suit their research terrain. Among these approaches are conventional content analysis (used

in interview-based research where theory is limited and insights, categories are allowed to flow from the data itself); directed content analysis (used to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory) or researchers can use summative content analysis (which involves identification and quantification of certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding their contextual usage in order to explore their usage) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

This research has employed the directed content analysis. Directed content analysis is considered under the basis that existing theory or prior research exists about a particular phenomenon, but can be deemed incomplete or needing further description. Its goal therefore is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory. Existing theory or research can be used to focus the research question; provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables. This in turn leads to determination of the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes. This approach is guided by a more structured process than in a conventional approach. Researchers begin by identifying key concepts or variables as initial coding categories (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Next, operational definitions for each category are determined using the theory.

Looking at existing literature (theory) this research will determine the categories within which the secularism phenomenon and its perception in Nepal can be broken down into codes and further seek to gain more understanding by comparing among the existing publications and other documentations with an aim of generating the operational meaning of the texts. As indicated earlier, the overall aim is to focus the research question and gain more knowledge with regard to the phenomenon in question. The findings from this approach will provide the research with supporting (and maybe non-supporting) evidence for a theory, which will be presented by showing codes with exemplars as well as by offering descriptive evidence. The categories that are newly identified either offer a contradictory view of the phenomenon under consideration or might further refine, extend, and enrich the theory. This is actually the main strength of a directed approach to content analysis, in that existing theory can be supported and extended. It also offers a potential to make explicit the reality that researcher's worked from a naive perspective (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Conversely, the directed approach has disadvantages. Based on its being built on prior theory, the research has as potential to approach the data with strong bias. As a result the researcher's findings or evidence may be supportive rather than non-supportive to the theory. Secondly, in an event that the researcher has put overemphasis on the theory, the researcher may be blinded to contextual notions of the phenomenon. However, re-examination of the data sources can always provide the researcher with a chance to confirm the data categories raised in the research.

### **2.2.2 Document Analysis**

Document analysis refers to a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, which may be both printed and electronic material. This analytical method used in qualitative research aims at examining and interpreting the data in order to in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and consequently develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007). Naturally, documents contain text and sometimes images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention in the first place. Scholars regard documents as 'social facts', which are produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways (Atkinson and Coffey 1997: 47). The range of documents that may be used for systematic evaluation as part of a study is wide, as this can include advertisements; agendas, attendance registers, and minutes of meetings; manuals; background papers; books and brochures; diaries and journals; event programs (i.e., printed outlines); letters and memoranda; maps and charts; newspapers (clippings/articles); press releases and many more. This study however will mainly involve books, articles, manuals and websites. The exercise deals with review of prior literature and that information is included in their reports. It entails finding, selecting, making sense of, and synthesizing data contained in documents. Document analysis yields data in forms of excerpts, quotations, or entire passages—that are then organized into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis (Labuschagne, 2003). This shows that the document analysis and content analysis will be used complimentarily, in order to generate relevant information that will be used in the discussion. Document and content analysis will be the source of secondary data in this research, data collected not from interviews but from the reviews of relevant documents that can inform this research. These will be organized for analysis as secondary source of information. This research will review a set of literature written and published in connection to the issues of the Nepalese secularization process.

The researcher is aware of the challenges that are connected to text analysis, and generation of verbal data through interviews. Interpretation of documents is subject to subjectivism and biases. Interviews being interactive, the research will make efforts to keep conversational biases in check (Silverman 2011). The researcher will strive to ensure proper asking of questions and creation of an environment for the respondents to provide answers to the questions without being guided to precepts as one way to keep biases in check to the (ibid).

### **2.2.3 Discourse Analysis**

Discourse Analysis is an approach in research interpretation that deals with empirical research and is commonly employed by researchers in not only in the social sciences but also in related disciplines. Discourse analysts deal very much with language data, including speech, documents or broadcast material. Researchers in different traditions study interactions and social practices, they analyze meaning-making and larger meaning systems, and contests and conflicts around collective identities, social norms and subjectification. It must be understood that this approach is more or less a general term for the many traditions which may bring about analysis of a particular discourse. This prompts the question of what discourse alone may stand for. It will be necessary to consider the term discourse before we can further discuss how this tool is used in research and how it can particularly apply to religion studies. Neumann has argued that meanings that people give to phenomenon are socially constructed. These meanings are referred to as representations and they can in the process form a language which in turn becomes institutionalized as they become a set of statements or practices. Once these become normal they are part of people's normative practice. In the process certain individuals may group up along the same representations, and create what is known as positions. These positions can then either be marginalized or may themselves be the dominant group (Neumann, 2008). In this way discourse is created. The discourse may represent the ideology at play in a particular group which in turn may be accepted or normalized by other members of a similar grouping.

In order to discover how discourses are expressive of domination and oppression discourse analysis becomes helpful. Neumann argues further that one may need to have competence in culture which will in turn help their ability to use discourse analysis. This is like a pre-requisite.

This competence can then aid someone to use the tools of discourse analysis and show variations in meaning and representations.

Discourse analysis then is a method used in qualitative research analysis in which the basic analytic unit is the interpretative. It reveals the value of a method of qualitative analysis which does not aim at capturing participants' authentic intentions, meanings, or experiences. In discourse analysis, interview data are analyzed at a macro-sociological level, as social texts. Discourse analysis is an approach which surpasses the dichotomy between subjective meanings and objective reality, as well as the dichotomy between user-centered and system-centered research (Talja, 1997). It concentrates on the analysis of knowledge formations, which organize institutional practices and societal reality on a large scale. It is a part of the linguistic turn in the social sciences and the humanities which emphasizes the role of language in the construction of social reality. It is one of the dominant or mainstream research approaches in communication, sociology, social psychology, and psychology.

Can discourse analysis apply to the study of religion? The answer is positive. Neumann states that in the process of discourse analysis texts are of vital use. Texts are read and analyzed. These are the texts that belong to an institution that is being investigated. He uses an example of political party that one will seek to study the texts that relate to the party. Religions too as institutions possess texts and therefore this is usable in the study of religion. The texts can reveal developments in the process of analysis. This in religion can lead to in-depth analysis of religious and how groupings relate in the process. Next there is mapping of representations which refers to the ability to see the representations and find out whether there are other alternative representations from the dominating ones. Particularly in religion such representations that maybe alternative would help provide better assessment of the powers at play in the practice of religion and find out dominating and oppressive representations which can then be challenged. I think that this can fit in with for instance feminist researchers.

Religion is historical and so the discourses that are presented are of different layers historically or otherwise. Neumann states that discourse analysis reveals these layers one of the steps. Using discourse analysis can mainly help to map and layer the representations in religious narratives and practices. I should point out that Neumann has not given a relationship to religion in his

discussion on discourse analysis, but I find it possible to relate to the study of religion in such way as explained.

In relation to the above, Foucault (2009) has written an interesting paper which considers the issue of religion and power. In subject and power he shows that society or institutions organize themselves in such categories of power and subject where one group is subjected to another dominating group. Especially in religion and Christianity in particular, it has formed and spread power relations throughout the world. Among Foucault arguments on religion and power he in particular on the notion of “pastoral power”, arguing that specific practices within Christianity were of importance in providing templates for governing conduct in other spheres (Foucault, 2009: 123). Foucault paid much a attention to the practice of confession in Roman Catholicism to highlight the power interface in interactions, tracing how this entailed the development of particular artefacts, such as the confessional box, and the formulation of detailed guidance for the interrogation of the faithful (Foucault, 1999: 171-191). I can relate this to representations and positioning that Neumann discussed above. In this process representations once accepted have born domination of one group within religion over the other. Discourse analysis can therefore help this paper to reveal such practices within the Nepalese experience both in pre and post secularism eras, and reveal any alternative representations. Use of discourse analysis in the study of religion can therefore be reflected in the authorities mentioned above.

### **2.3 Limitations And Challenges**

There are challenges that the secondary data analysis faces. Understandably, the data obtained through the books and other arguments may be difficult to determine the size. Of course, the general requirement is that the data should be adequate, relevant but not excessive. From this perspective, because the study deals with review of existing literature, it is understood that the issues of size would not matter that much. Furthermore, in secondary data analysis, the original data was not collected to answer the pre-sent research question. This places the burden on the researcher to ensure that the available data is reviewed in light of context and relevance.

In the course of carrying out this research a couple of limitations were encountered. The desk research was adopted due to difficulties to organize interviews due to distance and financial



limitations. Towards the end of the research the world was challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic which posed a huge problem as movements were restricted and many more issues that to an extent contributed to the challenges that this research faced. Furthermore, data that is dealing with the problem in the research question was not easy to specifically come by. This is so because originally the research was meant to be based on qualitative interview-generated data, and the change brought some hiccups to the researcher especially in dealing with contextual issues in the publications that deal with secularization and the perception of religions.

#### **2.4 Ethical Issues**

Being a desk research this study did not meet much of ethical problems. However, ethical issues in secondary research face challenges in terms of requirements to obtain permission from the owners. This ethical challenge is covered in that the freely available data for example from books implies that consent for further use is already intended or implied. As a result acknowledgment of the sources should be adequate. Based on this premise the researcher did not attempt to obtain permissions from the original owners as this would be out of reach.

#### **2.5 Conclusion**

Research methodology is the link between the problem statement and theory as well as the reality on the empirical domain. Social science researchers often prefer qualitative research strategies over quantitative strategies when researcher takes an interpretive epistemological standpoint, whereby the researcher is concerned with the meaning given to social action in this case represented in the reviewed texts and interpreting that in line with the present in a scientific manner. In this way the research contributes to the body of scientific knowledge. The theoretical stance of the researcher will influence adherence to their preferred research methods. This chapter has presented the methodological approach that was adopted in this study process, analysis and report. It also includes challenges and limitations met in the process of carrying out the research.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **3.0.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section contains three theoretical concepts which are being used in the present research so far. The conspiracy theory outlines the realization of information and misinformation that marks the discourse in the pros and cons of a secular society and as state sponsored religious system. Religion and power is used to analyze the relationship between the two, and seeks to outline the place of religion within the power and political spheres, which in the end explains the state of religious involvement in power politics and therefore in strengthening or derailing the secularization process. This theory will aid in assessing the perceptions and the reactions of religious sector to the constitutional change that listed Nepal as a secular state. The last theory to be considered is the secularization theory. Secularization theory will enable the research to highlight the picture of secularization as a theory. This in turn will shed light in analyzing people's views of the concept in the empirical field of the Nepalese society. These concepts will provide the theoretical perspective and the ground for discussing the issue that is being investigated in the present research.

#### **3.1. Secularization Theory**

Historically, classical secularization theory goes back to the early nineteenth century and the writings of Henri Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte. Generally, they both argued that human history passes through a series of distinct stages, in which the growing influence of the state and science impact the power and relevance of, which are gradually and irreversibly undermined, and weakened (Gorski in Dillon (ed), 2003). Their position is that modernity and religion do not mix. In social science philosophers like Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Marx Weber have echoed similar sentiments. They believed that the significance of religion especially that of Christianity was definitely on the decline. The view was strong among the Anglo-American sociology as well. Among them, we single out Parsons (1963), in the postwar, social scientists postulated that religion's public influence was shrinking, and many thought that private belief itself was bound to decline and even disappear, for instance Berger (1967) and Luckmann (1963). Secularization became part of "modernization theory" in the 1960s (Gorski, 2003: 111).

Modernization brought about complexity and more rational approach to matters, individualism and consequently as declined religious practice by masses. The decline of the modernization theory and the rest of the discipline have moved on to other approaches, those who propagate secularization still hold strong semblance to the classical theory of secularization propounded by Comte and Saint-Simon.

Classical secularization theory underscore the decline in orthodox Christian beliefs and practices in most parts of the West and interpret this as part of a more general decline in the power of religious institutions and ideas and linked this trend to various social processes that are said to influence this decline. These processes include differentiation, rationalization, industrialization, and urbanization loosely put together this is all about ‘modernization’. As the argument went, social institutions become more differentiated and social life becomes more rationalized, the resulting into, religious institutions and beliefs losing their power and effectiveness. Two main developments were used as support for this claim. First is the establishment and expansion of secular institutions in the fields of social provision, education, moral counseling, and other fields of services which initially were dominantly provided by religion (especially Christianity). This phenomenon was interpreted as a loss of social functions. The other development is that of long-term decline in orthodox Christian practice and belief which as noticed by contemporary observers is said to have started in the late nineteenth century and subsequently confirmed in opinion polls throughout the postwar period (Gaskins, Golder and Siegel 2013b). This is the case mostly in the west.

The view is that these changes can be observed especially among industrial workers and educated city-dwellers – the most “modernized” sectors of society – in other words, and seemed to underscore the connection between secularity and modernity. In continuation of the above arguments, the secularization theory considers the relationship between religion and human development. Does development affect a country’s level of religious attendance and belief? Considering the idea that from a causal perspective, secularization theory has to do with the choices and link between secular and religious goods, some scholars are of eh view that human development has a negative effect on religious attendance but no effect on religious belief. As societies develop, there may be decline in religious attendance, but this does not necessarily

imply a reduction of religious belief which remains high even as religious attendance slows down. A country's level of education and health drives the negative effect of human development on religious attendance. It is clear here that in considering secularization, one has to be careful which model is being used as the basis. If one considers secularization from the attendance perspective, they may miss the aspect of belief and consequently arrive at the unlikely conclusions with regard to the secularization status. We have to keep in mind the different aspects of religion or religious practice (Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Chaves, 2011; Gaskins, Golder and Siegel, 2013a).

In view of this, some scholars have come up with 'religious markets model' among many models. This model pays attention to the 'supply' of religion and anticipates flourishing of religion in the regions where the state stays away from intervening in the religious marketplace and where various religious organizations are free to compete for adherents (Finke, 1990; Chaves and Cann, 1992; Finke and Iannaccone, 1993). It is argued that the present direction in the study or religion this model features more. If we assess the Nepalese secularization, can we really see the trends mentioned here applied? Does it depict detached state to the affairs of the religious sector, and can we talk of the flourishing or decline of the aspect of secularization along with the developmental directions of the country.

Furthermore, it should be noted that secularization theorists approach the aspect of the meaning of the demise of religion differently. This difference is in light of whether it entails the decline of religious attendance, or religious belief, or the role of religions in the public sphere. Those who focus on religious attendance do so based on the issue the causal mechanism that they posit for secularization theory is fundamentally based on the substitutability of religious and secular goods as indicated earlier. This sense or basis for calculating the issue of secularization based on actual presence of masses in the religious spheres is taken to be relevant because it captures the opinion that being religious entails certain costs and commitment, and that the benefits from being religious are in most cases accessed only by those who actively engage in religious activities. It is calculated on the basis of time, effort and money spent to purchase the religious goods. From this economic perspective those who put in less, gain less religious goods and those who put in more tend to get more goods. The question is does that means the religious goods have secular

substitutes that should be understood to be purchased by those who put in less for the religious goods? It must be understood that not all religious goods can be said to possess secular substitutes. Furthermore, for those who let go of some secular benefits in favor of religious goods like belief in God do not incur any losses or costs. As a result it is not expected that human development that offers secular goods can directly cause the reduction in religious belief. From this angle, the paper will seek to highlight the three aspects as the basis for assessing people's view of secularization in Nepal. These aspects are the place of religion in the public sphere, religious attendance and religious belief. Since this paper deals more with the perception of the religious people on the matter of secularization, it is expected that the issue of presence of religion in the public sphere will dominate the other two.

### **3.2 Contextualization Of Secularization Theory**

This paper will also pay attention to the aspect of context with regard to the issue of secularization. It has drawn examples from various contexts from United States of America, Europe to Asia, and for this reason it is necessary to regard the aspect of context in view of the Nepalese secularization. The proponents of contextualization of secularization theory argue that the social, political and cultural circumstances in modern societies are necessary to be considered especially when we think that the secularization theory should be complemented by alternative approaches of sociology of religion. From this angle, secularization theory is a simply a starting point to structure the thoughts on the relationship between religion and society. Beyond this, it is necessary to consider context. Varied historical developments which in turn determine the cultural context, political surroundings and processes of identity building, lead to varied secularization paths and complex developments, as well as counter effects.

This argument questions the views that that processes of secularization are universal and that they are irreversible. This is taken to be problematic, and scholars of this view argue that secularization process is neither linear nor irreversible, nor uniform in kind and rate (Bruce 2011; Voas 2008). It is further argued that all socio-cultural processes, secularization inclusive, in the current multi-dimensional sense cannot be considered as independent from their valid contexts. This paper wished to assess the positioning of Nepal in considering its secularization; its positioning in the sense of cultural, religious and historical backgrounds, whether this can have a bearing on the practice and implementation of the secularization process that the constitution has

enshrined. This will enable the paper to highlight comparatively the place of Nepalese secularization within the global scene, and in turn make proper projections of what is to be expected in this regard. It is expected that the Nepalese context differs from other states, such that the type of secularization expected from Nepal as it develops further ought to be unique and share comparatively varying tenets when compared to other contexts. Furthermore it is going to provide the ground for assessing the foundation on which the Nepalese secularization is built.

### **3.3 Criticism Of Secularization Theory**

There are objections that have been raised against the classic secularization theory (or CST). One regards evidence and interpretation. Secularization theorists view the recent downtrend in popular religion for instance the orthodox Christianity as part of a long-term decline in religious practice. However, it is argued that there is lack clarity that the twentieth-century downtrend is indeed part of a long-term decline, this being said because there is generally lack clear evidence from the proponents of the Classic Secularization theory, to support this claim and to suggest that it is indeed the case. Usually the proponents refer to a barrage of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, portraying the middle ages' sense of Christendom and how it flourished and that it is see as all encompassing, with much commitment of its adherents as a show of the decline of religious practice when compared to the contemporary practice of religion. However, it is argued that such a portrait that is no longer credible, and as it stands there is still lack of proper evidence to prove the alleged decline of religion on a long term basis and as such this remains a hypothesis (Gorski 2003). Further, Casanova highlights similar sentiments that religion is still active such that there is need to reconstitute the concept of the secular, secularizations and secularisms (Casanova 2011).

In addition it is observed that in contemporary social sciences, the narrative that religion is waning in significance is no longer a dominant perspective. Instead there are new key words that are on the popular list in social sciences, for instance “deprivatization of the religious” (José Casanova), “return of the gods” (Friedrich Wilhelm Graf), “re-enchantment of the world” (Ulrich Beck)—or, desecularization (Peter L. Berger). This highlights the loss of popularity of the issue of secularization and the observation that religiosity is not declining rather it is resurfacing even in the public sphere. Arguments of the sociological classics into the strained relationship between religion and modernity are regarded as no longer valid. Scholars are no longer speaking of the decline of religion in modern societies, but instead emphasis is on issues such as the resurgence

of religion in modern societies. The tide is flowing in reverse, scholars have emphasized on criticizing the secularization theory this has become a new master narrative itself. This is where there is need to consider a reconstruction of the arguments of the secularization theory. To cover for that, this paper has included the aspect of contextualization of the theory, as well as regarded the need to be clear on what side of the model the theory is employed (Gosrki 2003).

However, in response to the criticism, two recent studies have suggested that discarding the theory of secularization may have been done too quickly (Gaskins, Golder and Siegel, 2013a, b). These studies reconsider the aspect of a causal pathway by which human development affects religion. They, contrary to the position that religious and secular benefits do not always substitute one another, argue that actually religious and secular benefits are often substitutes for one another. They base this on both the demand-side and supply-side explanations of religion. They state that when the ability to secure secular goods increase, the desire to secure religious goods goes to the decline side. Considering that the ability to secure secular goods increases human development, this argument states that it is still valid to argue that religion will decline as societies develop. In response to the critique of secularization theory based on empirical studies this view contends that the do analyses lack sufficient variation in human development to appropriately evaluate the predictions of secularization theory. It is argued that the negative relationship between religion and human development still remains strong based on the assessment of the variations of human development. (Ibid.)

### **3.4 Religious Rejection Of Secularization**

The secularization of the East has been the slowest in the history of secularization. To an extent scholars can talk of resistance of secularization in recent years. It is argued that people in the East now take secular nationalism as a ‘kind of religion’ (Clarke, Powell and Savulescu 2013). A leader in Iranian Revolution writes secularism is not only a religion but also peculiar to the west. This view of is also expressed by Juergensmeyer who postulates that

“secular nationalism responds to the same needs for collective identity, ultimate loyalty, moral authority that religion has traditionally responded to and that this similar response makes secular nationalism de facto a religion” (Clarke, Powell and Savulescu 2013: 19).

As a result secularism may be viewed with suspicion, competition and consequently resistance would follow. Furthermore, it is argued that the western nature of secularism is understood as coming in the shell of religion itself, in the name of Christianity. They claim it is because the west is less secular as it claims and they still run “Christian Governments”. Examples given in support of this argument among others include the fact of some socialist parties in Europe who use Christianity in their names (Clarke, Powell and Savulescu 2013:19). Secular may be viewed to mean a state of discontinuation from religious and spiritual matters. However according to recent trends in western style of secularism it has been argued that it is more of sense of deprogramming of people from their original belief systems, and then reprogramming them with a new belief system. The argument further states that secularism has become a tool to maintain asymmetrical power relations in the west and the rest of the world.

It is viewed that the western way of enlightenment of which secularization is part, has been exported to the post-colonial societies. In this respect, Nepal remains exceptional given its non-colonial history. None of the western colonial powers acted on Nepal officially to colonize it. However, it is observed that Nepal despite not being colonized it is conceived that it has always been positioned by neighboring India. For every political solution in Nepal India has to be seen as a partner. As such events in India can also be said to have direct connection to Nepal. Indian was colonized by the British under the East India Company for several decades and only became independent in 1947. India was declared as a Secular country only by the 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 (The Constitution of India). However, the complexity of the scholarly discussion about the meaning of Secular continues to become a 'contested' concept among social scientists.

In the West secularism is understood to refer to freedom of faith; equal citizenship to every citizen regardless of religion and separation of the religion from the state. However, in India despite being a secular constitution the government continues to regulate and administer temples, universities and monasteries with significant amount of funding to operate them (Acevedo 2013). These trends can highlight the events in Nepal based on the historical links with India, some of which have been highlighted above. It can help the study on the young secular Nepal to check the secularization process and how it plays out in implementation of the secularization.



### **3.5 Religion And Power**

Some scholars are of the view that resistance to the secularization could be fueled by strong religions who do not want to relinquish power. David Rangdrol in his thesis *Religious Nationalism in Nepal: Understanding the Demise of Hindu Kingdom* has cited the work of Almond et al. who argued that the reaction against secularism is clearly the resistance power of “Strong Religion”. He posits that fundamentalism is a strong and tremendously rich, drawing various social structures and political atmosphere of the many global contexts (Rangdrol, 2007). There is continued controversial practice with regard to the secular claimant states. It is argued therefore that despite the claims of secularized and privatized societies, religion in such states has fundamentally continued to perform complex, multiple roles and functions in the said societies” Almond et al: 2003:9). These kinds of roles of religion are clearly visible in the countries that present themselves assecular like the United States, Europe including South Asia. These arguments indicate the place of power of religions which as indicated has not entirely been removed from the social constructions around the globe. The question therefore is how much has the Nepalese dominant religion relinquished its power, and how much does the state stand independent of the influence of religion in its affairs? Using this concept the paper intends to look at the contextual development in relation to power of religion in the secularized states in this case Nepal.

### **3.6 Conspiracy Theory**

The term generally refers to the explanation of a phenomenon or situation that invokes a conspiracy by certain actors and often political in motivation, when in fact there are other more probable explanations to the same phenomenon (Goertzel 1994). It is about explanation that features a conspiracy among a group of agents as a central ingredient. Keeley (1999, p.116) defines it as an explanation of an event by the causal agency of a small group of people acting in secret. The unofficial explanation is deemed fallacious by others while the ones holding it deem it as the real truth. The term has a derogatory connotation, implying that the appeal to a conspiracy is based on prejudice or insufficient evidence (Bayford, 2011). Conspiracy theories technically aim at resistance of falsification. In most cases, the conspiracy becomes as something that can mainly be believed to exist other than based on actual production of evidence. Evidence

against the theory as well as lack of evidence for its claims becomes a fueling for holding it as true (Barkun 2003).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *conspiracy theory* as "the theory that an event or phenomenon occurs as a result of a conspiracy between interested parties; *spec.* a belief that some covert but influential agency (typically political in motivation and oppressive in intent) is responsible for an unexplained event". The word "conspiracy" derives from the Latin *con-* ("with, together") and *spirare* ("to breathe").

Robert Blaskiewicz (2013) argues that the term was used as early as the nineteenth century and agrees that its usage has always been derogatory. According to a study by Andrew MacKenzie-McHarg, as recent as 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the term *conspiracy theory* in the nineteenth century simply "suggests a plausible assumption of a conspiracy and that at this point the term does not carry any connotations, either negative or positive (MacKenzie-MacHarg 2019). What MacKenzie-McHarg suggests is in this paper important as it will look at the aspect of conspiracy from both positive and negative angles.

For others, a conspiracy theory is more than simply a conspiracy. They are understood as deliberately orchestrated acts, pre-meditated and acted out mostly by a group of people. A conspiracy theory, on the other hand, is an intellectual construct aimed at giving a sense of order to events. In line with this angle, it is believed that some small and hidden group can and have attempted to manipulate events to effect a view of events that is desired. A conspiracy theory can be local or international, focused on single events or covering multiple incidents and entire countries, regions and periods of history. In most cases conspiracy theorists claim and boast of having access to special knowledge or a special mode of thought that separates them from the masses who according to them are deceived to believe the official account of phenomena, which in their view is falsified (Barkun 2016).

Some researchers have suggested that belief in conspiracy theories can sometimes be psychologically harmful (Freeman & Bentall, 2016) and that it is highly correlated with psychological projection and paranoia (Douglas and Sutton 2011). Conspiracy theories have

become commonplace in mass media, emerging as a cultural phenomenon of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Barkun, 2003).

Secularization in the context of Nepal is highly attached to a variety of assumptions and suspicions, for instance that secularization was not demanded by citizens, but that some forces acted out of their own interests and suspicious cause to activate it. Therefore one of the approaches to have a closer look and analyze the views of the religious masses and attain more information might be 'conspiracy theory.' However contemporary scholarship on conspiracy theory is so complex that it can be quite confusing and may mislead to an irrational understanding. Sometime theorizing conspiracy may disregard necessary and complex social changes which are inevitable given the socio-political complexities. Acknowledging that we are in the age of globalization and advancement of technology and information has brought the world closer. Many things we think are true may not be true. Conspiracy theory often gives attention to plot and pathology and it remains often incomplete (Dean, 2000: 2). As Jodi Dean puts it, "what we see is not what we get" (Dean 2000). He further quoted Kathleen who postulates that "the more we know, the less we know" (Dean, 2000:1). The sentiments highlight the Conspiracy theories are seen as a way to explain a social phenomenon by suspecting and discovering people who might have planned to bring the phenomenon in order to achieve some hidden or known agenda (Popper, 1972). Most conspiracies are unsuccessful since few things turn out exactly as intended. Conspiracy theories do face the problem of generalization based on epistemic problem of conspiracy theories (Buenting and Taylor, 2010, Popper 1972). However, this does not imply that conspiracy theories cannot be representational of reality. The theories need to be evaluated on their merits and demerits and not merely their being conspiracies, because some can be representational of reality on the ground (Pigden 1995)

Räikkä (2009b3) and Moore (2016) highlight the social and political effects of conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorizing. The conspiracy theories can be seen both from positive and negative angles. At some point to consider the relevance or importance of conspiracy theories or its damaging effect commentators argue for a pragmatic approach, by considering the lived experiences. Positively, conspiracy theories may be used as tools to reveal the actual conspiracies that may be going on in particular institutional establishments. Uncovering such conspiracies where they exist will lead to correction of the wrongs uncovered in the conspiracies

and thereby promoting institutional integrity. Conspiracy theories can help citizens to remain critical of those holding various power positions in society. From a negative perspective, Conspiracy theories have a capacity to contribute to eroding trust in the national institutions and groups. It leads to a difficulty to distinguish between the right criticism and the unwarranted criticism that various actors may receive from the public (Huneman and Vorms 2018); and can also cause wrong perception of root causes to social phenomena. In line with this view, conspiracy theories undermine effective political action and social change, by assuming that social events are manufactured by some agents acting in secret, other than being effects of structural social conditions (Popper 1972). These reading call for careful assessment of conspiracy theories, and that despite sometimes being vague and ambiguous conspiracy as a theory is still a relevant theoretical element for the analysis of matters like the one in this study. It will be adopted to provide a possibility of viewing the responses from the research sample with a stronger objectivity than what would be possible if the theory was not employed.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter highlights the main theoretical premise on which the paper is built. The conspiracy theory will be used to assess the validity and the strength of arguments on the sides of both proponents and opponents of the secularization process. It is meant to provide the ability to apply a critical mind to the views that are generated in the research. The concept of religious rejection of secularization is employed to provide an effective assessment of the reasons why religion is opposed to secularization and whether and why this trend in Nepalese context.

The concept of religion and is employed in order to provide the paper with the ability to assess the link between the state and religion, and interpret it properly. The interpretation comes in the wake of the need to evaluate the role religion plays in the secularized society and if it still holds any power in that regard. This line of thinking will help to assess whether the question of secularization is fully operational or not. Lastly the secularization theory outlines the main arguments within the theory, the contextual aspect of the theory, and the criticism of the theory. This theory has been used to assess the depth and the model that can be observed in the Nepalese secularization, differentiate the Nepalese secularization by contextualizing it and lastly to consider whether there is an upward grown or decline of secularization in Nepal since its inception. These theories may have been born in the West but their applicability to the Nepalese

context is not impossible. For this reason the theories will be applied in the contextual sense to the Nepalese society.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This section will attempt to discuss the main issues in the research theme, by putting the research questions into focus. To achieve this, the section will review and analyze a number of literatures in line with the concept of secularism and how Nepalese religions, especially Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism perceive it; looking at the continuities and discontinuities between the past state and the present state; as well as how the Nepalese secularism relates to the global context. Information here will be linked with the theory discussed in the third chapter of this paper. The section will be divided into three main parts. In the first part, I will present the information from various literature on secularism on the past state and present status of secularism; on general perception of secularism in Nepal; and Nepalese secularism in relation to the global context. In the second section, I will discuss the idea of pro-secular people and their motivation behind making the country secular, and those that decline the secular model preferring the previous arrangement. The third section will then offer the analytical remarks over these arguments in relation to the theories raised in the third chapter.

#### 4.1 Nepalese Public Opinion

Pawan Kumar Sen reveals two conflicting positions that emerge from the Nepalese public domain with regard to the preference towards secularism. He bases his analysis on a public survey that was conducted between 2006 and 2012. The conflicting positions are support for secularism and support for state sponsored religion. Generally he indicates that the opinion points towards the majority of the Nepali public being in support of prefer a Hindu state at the national level. Among those who support the Hindu state are the hill caste groups; the *Madhesi* caste groups; Tarai indigenous groups, and adherents to rightist political parties. Clearly, these are all predominantly Hindu adherents. He however argues that the minority that is in support of secularism is understandably a significant percentage as well and when taken at sub-national level they tend for a majority of the given partitions.

The groupings in support of secularism include the Buddhists, Muslims, *Kirati*, Christians, indigenous hill groups, and supporters of most of the Communist parties. This for Kumar leads to a conclusion that the Hindu state dominance is not universally accepted in Nepal, and vice versa. Furthermore Kumar argues that secularism is identified with Republicanism and Federalism forms of governance. The supporters of these two forms are likely to be in support of secularism which for him justifies the identity of the Nepalese state with secularism. The preference of Hinduism is constituted along a lengthy history of Nepal's Hindu dominance, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Coming from Monarchical governance with the Hindu predominance Nepal's history reveals a strong lean towards Hinduism and therefore the identification of the state with Hinduism. The recent developments that have seen Nepal turn into a democracy can therefore consequently lead to the adoption of secularism (Sen: 2015).

Letizia (2012) highlights the Nepalese reception and perception of secularism. She agrees that it is not yet clear to which type of secularism the state is committed, and the concept is obviously still in the making, that even in the constitution the provisions are still insecure as the reference to secularism is not well established and as indicated by others it is implicitly carried (Adhikary 2010). There has been a lot of discourse within the public in a number of platforms where the idea is subjected to discussion. This can be seen in incidents between the government and religious devotees, through court cases, as well as anti-secular campaigns and demonstrations that have been advanced. Such incidents provide a means the public to engage in the debate on the matter of secularism and relations between the state and religion. Through such one can peep into the processes through which secularism is taking shape in all its complexity.

The background to the onset of secularism may provide some light as to whether the parties involved in the original fight for secularism were fully aware of what they were advocating for. For some, secularism was above all else a move against the monarchy, in the hope of removing the religious basis of his power, and not necessarily a specific project of the society. It can be observed that there is lack generally of the same will power observed at the early stage. For instance Letizia (2012: 76) observes that among the politicians who supported the inclusion of secularism in the Interim Constitution, there was no strong commitment towards it and many did not really want it, nor were they clear about its implications. It has also been observed that 'pro-

secular' politicians are said to unofficially state that they disagreed with secularism or were not sure that it was appropriate for Nepal. Such uncertainties may point to lack of clear strategy and outline as to what was being advocated. It is possible that each advocate had own reasons and for a nationally agreed paradigm to appear it will be more complex and will require deliberate effort from the authorities to engage with the public. At the turn of the year 2010 the anti-secular voices became popular again and campaign to advocate for re-establishment of the Hindu state was high, and even supported by some government members. The efforts however were landed on dead ground as the politicians did not take them serious and branded them reactionary. However as Letizia rightly observes these voices only called for the need to clarify what secularism is and what it is not (Letizia 2012). Clearly secularism as applied in Nepal has been very divisive and that there is not one voice but divergent voices in the secularism discourse.

#### **4.1 The Global Context**

Casanova states the contextual complexity even within the western circles with regard to implementation of secularism. Casanova has argued for the need to distinguish between three main connotations of secularism. He looks at secularization as the *decline of religious beliefs and practices* in modern societies; as the *privatization of religion* and as the *differentiation of the secular spheres* (state, economy, science). Viewing secularisation as the decline of religious beliefs is taken be a universal, human, developmental process, most recent but also most widespread usage of the term in contemporary academic debates on secularization. The modern political development has leaned towards the second notion where secularization is viewed as removal of religion from the public sphere and to make it a private matter. It is the choice taken by most liberal and democratic societies (or at least intended). Within the classical development of secularism Casanova states that the target is the differentiation of the secular spheres which are state, science and economy. It focuses mainly on the need to transfer powers religious to civil entities (Casanova 2006:8). Some aspects of secularism for instance can work in the United States yet not in Europe and vice versa. It highlights the complexity of secularism, and calls for the need to critically assess the contextual applicability in order to reach significantly national levelling on the concept. The practice historically in Europe has been moving between the classical and the most recent view pointing to the decline of religious beliefs and practices among the European population. For Europeans, the two notions are observable, the “decline in



the societal power and significance of religious institutions, and the decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals” (Ibid: 8; Hackett 2005). These notions have been exposed to criticism and revisiting in the past two decades. However as it stands, argues Casanova,

“...the understanding of secularization as a single process of functional differentiation of the various institutional spheres or sub-systems of modern societies remains relatively uncontested in the social sciences, particularly within European sociology” (Casanova, 2006: 9).

One thing though remains factual, that these notions are applied differently in Europe and in America, which clearly leads to the question of context. Iqtidar and Sarkar (2013), state that the discussions on secularization are mainly approached on two facets. Either approached from a broad, theoretical angle or deeply contextualized angle. The intention in this paper in view of Nepal is to provide a holistic view of Secularism in the country, keeping two aspects of theory and context

To go further, the question faced by scholars in recent times with regard to secularism is that the reality of religion is more widespread at a time when it has been exposed to so much criticism. It is a social fact according to Casanova that religion is becoming more popular than ever. George Moyser writes:

“The view is taken, in other words, that ‘secularization’, or ‘modernization’, have not marginalized religion in the modern world—at least not to the extent that it ceases to have much relevance to politics, or politics to religion.” (Moyser, 1991: 2)

It is clear that Religion remains a live part of human existence. How then does the social scientist approach the question of secularism? For scholars like Casanova this trend must lead to re-consideration of what is meant with regard to secular and secularism. This need emerges from the reality observed above, and as such the global social scientist faces the question of rethinking of what is secular in this new understanding. This is true in Nepal in that, as observed by Kumar, majority of Nepalese community still support state sponsored religion, hence the concept of

secularism not being universal. While religious diversity that has been witnessed over the years calls for a neutral government and protection of rights of the minority religious groups, the pressure from the dominant groups weigh on the opposite end too. It is therefore necessary to analyze the Nepalese application of Secularism in light if the two facets in the picture.

The scholarly questions in light of this on the global application of secularism can also be relevant for Nepalese context. Among the question asked are the following:

“To what degree are the concepts shaped by the European historical experience? Do they perhaps carry the baggage of Western, specifically Christian, notions? To what extent are religion and secularism twin concepts that speak to similar moral sensibilities? Is there currently a decline in secularism, or is there, rather, a reformulation of the secular/religious distinction? Can this distinction be transcended through new ways of thinking about civil society and the public sphere, political order and social transformation, global politics and international affairs?” (Bronk: 2012: 1)

The first three questions relate to the fact that the term is globally used and applied in light of what first emerged in the Christian west. It is also based on the observation that the usage of the word religion does not need to mean the same in different regions. The fourth question raises the concerns indicated above, the change in the perception of secularism. Social scientists are tasked with the need to re-interpret what secularism entails. This question therefore begs the need account for the revitalization of the religious spheres by re-interpreting what religion means and in light of the concept of secularism.

It is necessary to understand the concepts as applied in the other parts of the globe before we can understand the concept as applied in Nepal. For example as Bronk observes:

“To speak of Western modernity as secular can among others mean: distinction of church and state, separation of church and state, and, finally, sidelining of religion from the state and from public life (Taylor), the separation of religion from public life, the decline of religious belief (in God), and practice among ordinary people, as what is left after

religion fades, the neutrality of the state with regard to religious beliefs and especially to the church". (Bronk 2012: 2)

The views are so wide that express what secularism entails. They also extend to secularism as simply a worldview; the removal of religion into a "private" sphere and the assumption that public life should be basically secular; or may mean an extreme utopian ideal of a world free of every kind of religion, it may also mean enlightened ideas about the progress, in which religion (magic) has to be replaced by scientific rationality. What "secular" means in this context may not necessarily cover the meaning of "the secular" or secularism in Nepal. Nepal has not been predominated by Christianity, but Hinduism. While some circles of Christianity in some parts of the world are used to be opposed to secularism, in Nepal they would be among those minority religions who advocate for secularism, and consequently their view of secularism may end up with notions that are different from those meant in the other parts of the world.

Considering that the concept of secularism has been imported into Nepal, the questions we have to bear in mind are: is has the public in Nepal understood the concept in light of the declaration of the state as secular? What forces if any have been behind the introduction of secularism? And which form or vision of secularism has been implemented in the country? Are there any conspiracies hatched in the implementation of the concept?

#### **4.1 The Indian Context**

The Indian context is perplexing in a number of ways. An outlook on the Indian can provide this paper with a comparative advantage bearing in mind that India and Nepal share some aspects politically and historically India defines itself constitutionally as a "secular" republic. Demographically India's population is over 80 percent Hindu, and has the world's second largest Muslim population (more Muslims than in all Middle Eastern countries). This translates into the role of "religion" in political and public life being of central importance, and consequently conflicts among religious groups are not uncommon, over issues like religious conversion and the rights of state support.

Secularism in India is defined variously and based on various contexts or standpoints, either in support or in condemnation of the subject. Some political candidates seeking political advancements point out "secular" virtues provided in the Indian Constitution and look at secularism in terms of the right "freely to profess, practice and propagate religion," which the Indian constitution clearly provide for (Article 25(1)). When having the majority Hindus in mind politicians refer to the spirit of tolerance toward all religions and it is also claimed to be stated in the constitution. Others may only look at secularism in terms of equal treatment of religions by the state or the careful involvement with religions on the part of the state. In some instances the Indian politicians argue for an involvement of the government with religions by the government in terms of availing them quotas in educational or political institutions, but this is usually in the confines of the caste and religious affiliations in question. Thus the Indian view of secularism is ambiguous (Stephens 2004, Stephens 2007; Baird, 1993; The Constitution of India 2000). However one can see in the discussions above that the view of secularism centres on state-religion relationship as well as secular virtues as fundamental corners that provide the secular view among the Indian scholars and the public.

I wish to conclude this section by considering the connection between the western view of secularism and that of India, seeking to trace the lines of confrontation as well as agreement between the two contexts which will later be used to analyze the Nepalese context. In western contexts secularism points to rejection of domination of religious institutions and symbols, and this is traceable in the spread civilization; the rise of Communism, modern nationalism, modern economic process or the "dynamic of industrial revolutions. It is argued that out of this process have risen good things, the profound social changes that have been observed in human development. Another classic view sees secularism as a way in which moral compass must be based not on religious beliefs but on the wellbeing of man in the present other than the future state or demands seen in Christian beliefs.

How then has secularism challenged the traditional India? And how does the Indian secularism correspond to the Western view of secularism? The Indian secularism is challenged by religious and traditional laws governing social facets like marriage, divorce, inheritance childcare and divorced women. The legal requirement is that there be a uniform treatment and application of

laws irrespective of the religious or caste affiliations, and an ambition indicated in the laws that there will be a replacement of personal laws of the religious groupings by a universal civil code (Stephens 2007). This background raises questions. First the linkage between personal, religious laws available among communal and the cross-cultural applicability of the "religious" paradigm. The western sense religious versus the secular may interact, but this may not necessarily apply to the Indian context. Differentiating religious matter from secular or legal matters proves unfavourable for those religious communities that see such dichotomies as not valid. Among the Hindu, Islamic, and Buddhist traditions; Jews and Christians religion and law for instance are not considered to be separate categories. As a result there arises tension between traditional power and law and modern secular approaches adopted in the Indian context.

#### **4.1 Opponents And Proponents Of Secularism**

The above sentiments are approached generally without specific reference to religious, political and ethnic (to mention a few) groupings. Before finishing this portion I would like to make mention of specific groups' perceptions towards secularism. The battle for or against secularism is fought among a number of groupings, from religious, political to ethnic. These players have various perceptions in view of secularism, various motivations for and against this concept.

Within the religious circles, the proponents of secularism are minority religions in the name of Islam, Christianity and Buddhists to mention a few, who benefitted from the movements against the monarchy and the demand for liberalism. They pushed for a multicultural, inclusive, democratic society (Leve 2007; Letizia 2012; Lawoti 2005; Stephens 2007). It is necessary that I mention that the timing does look like random, because the main event was the democratic movement that saw the overthrow of the monarchy and the writing of a new constitution. Secularism was a concept that came to within an existing conflict against the Hindu establishment and the monarchy. The Hindu establishment then was opposed to the idea of secularism, arguing that it destroyed the identity of Nepal and put the other religious identity in jeopardy (it is not clear how this is the case though) (Adhikary 2010; Letizia 2012).

The other front was the ethnic front. The conflict that gave a chance to secularism to be adopted came within the struggle for ethnic identity of other minority groups in Nepal. The background

to the domination of one Ethnic group and one religion is the ambition of the Monarchy to create one National identity in a bid to form a pure Hindu state and stand against the British that has succeeded in disrupting India. The 18<sup>th</sup> century monarchy sought to unite all small ethnic groups under one Hindu national Identity. This consequently deprived the minority ethnic groups as well as religious groups. This continued until around 1951 when the monarchy and the autocratic rule were suspended and democracy demanded. The new leadership only eased some aspects of the control measures but they allowed for multiplicity of religions and to an extent Ethnic identity (Lawoti, 2005; Gaige 2009). The freedom was not enough; the monarchy continued to exercise control and the higher ethnicities of the Hindus were in control, such that by the 90s the masses began to demand more. The minority groups classified collectively as *janajati* (Letizia, 2012: 71) demanded inclusiveness and a guarantee of ethnic, religious and linguistic minority rights in the new democracy. They challenged the high Caste Hindus and opted for a more inclusive Nepal ethnically. The political proponents of secularism came from the minority groups as well. For instance Buddhists according to Letizia sought to advance themselves by taking part in shaping the political landscape of Nepal.

#### **4.1.1 Questioning Nepalese Secularism**

A few issues may be highlighted in view of the Nepalese version of secularism. Firstly the constitutional provision is implicit. There is lack of adaptation of the concept in Nepalese context. It may therefore carry diverse meanings for diverse parties. Understanding the Hindu background of the nation, some have underscored merits in the Hindu background, for instance in seeing that the Hindu State identity has had some a positive impact in bringing together communities like the Madhesi and ‘Pahadi’ regardless of their linguistic ethnic and caste differences. Such views argue that the removal of the Hindu identity in the constitution has brought about an Identity crisis in the nation and this has affected various communities in Nepal (Adhikary 2010). Adhikary is of the view that the previous Hindu identity is shared by a huge majority of Nepalese among both the Pahadi and Madhesi people, and its removal therefore brings about identity crisis, and where the traditionally accepted identities are falling apart. The situation is aggravated for those communities whose national and religious identities are same.

Identity crisis being argued here can be appreciated in the context of Hinduism being seen as the factor that contributed to the coming together of hill communities, the Madheshi and 'Pahadi' communities who are otherwise of fundamental differences of language, caste, ethnicity, color and regional consciousness, who were able to unite under that identity. The religious binding force from this angle is considered disturbed with the coming in of secularism. Such sentiments are however expressed by the groups that are in their view opposed to secularism perhaps without necessarily conceiving fully what secularism means and in what way it positively contributes to the state building. The sentiments fail to acknowledge the identity needs of the minority groups like Islam and Christianity but seeks to promote the majority groups' needs. It is proper to bring into perspective the identity concerns for the minorities in the country. Islam for instance may have sought to promote the Islamic Identity in the nation, as they have been part of the struggle in the building of a state with diverse identity. As is agreed by Hardy (1972) and Lawoti and Hangen (2013), this is a complex matter. Complex in the sense that there are underlying issues that can come into the limelight when discussing religious identity in such contexts. Islam has been one of the marginalized minority group yet they also share complicated ideologies like nationalism. Their identity within a State that defined by the dominant Hindu brings about complex outcomes. Raising identity question in such a context reveals how important it is for the state and the minority religions in Nepal must see beyond the mere political results in promoting secularism and consider the issues that matter in their ideologies and consequently harmonize them to create an inclusive environment for the citizenry.

Such an approach can be appreciated seen in light of Islamic view of nationalism. If Islam is a nation within a nation, how can this ideology be understood in a non-Islamic dominant state? If this is to resonate with the wider society, discursive efforts in constructing a palatable view needs to be deliberately undertaken by the concerned community and the general public. These efforts would bring out other ways of conceiving the ideologies and in the long run solve the matters like the ones raised by Adhikari (2010) as indicated above. The next question is on the practicability of the secular model in the Nepalese context.

The very first observation is that secularism is a western concept, as observed elsewhere in this paper, when the separation of Church and state was the main question. Considering that Nepal had never had an organized Church, it questions the core of the employment of the concept and

its applicability. Some authors question whether the term is understood in the Nepalese context (Letizia, 2012; Thapa 2010). Letizia's research in the Tarai region shows that for the intellectuals, secularism is separation of State and Religion. For religious minorities and activists it is abolition of Hindu domination. For the Hindu fundamentalists, the concept is "despicable and uncalled-for measure attacking the identity of the country and leading to communal violence"; for Muslims Secularism is a good opportunity to get the *sharia* enacted as their community's own personal law and to receive more state support for their community's schools (*madrasahs*); while for Christians, (mostly evangelical Churches) secularism is simply a permission to proselytise, despite the letter of the law. These are the sentiments shared but various communities within the Nation with regard to secularism, bringing the relevant question whether the concept is understood by various parties in the country.

The differences in the contextual background of Nepal and considering that Secularism is wider in its application calls for its adaptation to the Nepalese needs. The nation states that adopted secularism in the European (and some African States) shared a common background of being previously dominated by Christianity. Nepal which has been under the domination of Hindu religion instead is likely to face challenges and therefore the need for adaptation other than wholesale importation of other nations' experiences. However, I am of the view that the ambiguity of context need not be a hindrance to the application of secularism in Nepalese context. However, I must observe that failure to clearly adapt and apply may cause a breakdown, create suspicions and unnecessary accusations. One of such aspects to be borne in mind is the diversity of the Nepalese religious background. As highlighted by Letizia (2012) for the Muslims, Hindus and Christians secularism will not simply mean separation of religion from the State. Adaptation must consider how these religions should interpret secularism.

The conspiracy theory discussed in this paper reveals that some quarters perceive secularism as a result of conspiracy advanced by some leaders motivated by western attempts to control the Nation as well as to advance the Christian agenda. The conspiracies arise out of the failure to generate a correct reading of the concept of secularism by various religious segments involved. The conspiracy are seen in light of the cow as a sacred animal. The 2015 Constitution asserts that the cow remains a national animal. The Hindu followers feel offended that the animal can now in the secular Nepal be slaughtered anyhow, while on the other hand there are attempts to save some endangered species within the country like the Tiger, Dogs, Donkeys, or the Elephants, and



that but there is no effort to protect the cow which is constitutionally protected. As can be seen, the pro-Hindu citizens feel that religion must remain in the public domain in the way of observing of some particular Hindu rituals like the viewing of the cow as a sacred animal and thereby prohibiting its slaughter. Globally there are varying beliefs about cattle in societies and religions. Due to that, in some areas like Nepal and most Indian Cow Slaughter is prohibited eating their meat may be taboo. Not only in Hinduism but also other religions like Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and others, the cow is considered sacred. Sacredness of the animal is therefore viewed as part of religious life and thereby an integral part of the secularization process especially because in Nepal the State prior to secularism was involved in the protection of the animal. The complexity of the matter with respect to Nepal is that the Hindu notions are still respected leading others to comment that Nepal may be constitutionally multi-cultural, multi-religious, secular country, yet the separation of religion from the state philosophy of secularism is not observed. The Hindu values, practices and rituals are still part of the system. Among others is the fact that the constitution is yet to decriminalise cow slaughter (Thapa 2010; Letizia 2012).

The conspiracy question should be considered critically by those that advance them. Conspiracy theories are viewed by other commentators as mistaken approach to the explanation of social phenomena. This is the case when conspiracy theories are seen as a way to explain a social phenomenon by suspecting and discovering people who might have planned to bring the phenomenon in order to achieve some hidden or known agenda (Popper, 1972). While this is the case, most conspiracies are unsuccessful since few things turn out exactly as intended. Other than advance conspiracies, social science is there to explain the unforeseen consequences of intentional human action (ibid). Some scholars argue that dismissal of conspiracy theories is based on the problem of generalization based on epistemic problem of conspiracy theories (Buenting and Tailor, 2010, Popper 1972). However, this does not imply that conspiracy theories cannot be representational of reality. The theories need to be evaluated on their merits and demerits and not merely their being conspiracies, because some can be representational of reality on the ground (Pigden 1995). The conspiracy theories in the Nepalese context result from varied perception of secularism by the Hindu and non-Hindu religious affiliates. I believe questions and difficulties arise because of the failure by to contextualize the Nepalese secularism process, as well as raises the need to interface with all concerned parties in order to provide an interpretation of secularism that resonates with context.

The western secularism has sentiments of religion being a private affair, and of the propelling motive in advancement of secular virtues was to remove religion from the public sphere, and that the state has nothing to do with religion (this does not mean the state cannot interact with religion). In the Nepalese context it is clear that the State has not been able to completely be divorced from religion. Hindu events like the pilgrimage financial aid from the government of Nepal may be expected. Moreover, within the premise of Singh Durbar the Central Hajj Committee (CHC) receives Hajj subsidiary from the government and foreign states. Not only that but also there are a number of ways in which the Nepalese government is accused of siding with the Hindu religion. Letizia writes:

“The state is still involved in the management of trusts associated with Hindu gods and temples; government funds are spent on Hindu religious festivals; cow slaughter and conversion are still outlawed, many laws are based on Hindu norms and values; Hindu temples are found in government buildings, schools, military camps and courts; public holidays are mostly Hindu festivals; and the President of the Republic has in many instances replaced the former Hindu king at public religious functions. In short, secularism seems to face many challenges,” (Letizia 2012: 116)

The State advocates for secularism in theory and in its constitution and other legislature but in action there is still visible presence of the State in the Hindu religious affairs. Considering that secularism is perceived differently by different people, for instance that the declaration of the state as secular could mean to one person end of Hindu prominence and therefore think the secularism declaration means an end of Hinduism, seeing the presence of the State in Hindu affairs is likely to cause dissatisfaction by the minority groups. The question is what meaning could be made out of this phenomenon? Furthermore, secularism is implicitly expressed in entire constitutional framework. So, what does secularism in Nepali context mean? Is it to be understood as a constitutional value that seeks to manage diverse and plural society of Nepal into a bond of trust for achieving a national goal? Or is it mainly to end the dominance of Hinduism and fight against the monarchy? It may be a constitutional values intending to create more inclusive society and end dominance of a single religion, allowing participation of the religious and cultural minority in the affairs of the State, but to achieve this requires that the State needs to

do more. At the moment the constitution may not be reflective of this and the perceptions of the various groups also reveal the gaps.

Furthermore one may question the interpretation of the provisions in the constitution in light of secularism bearing in mind that some important aspects are not fully considered. Not only that but also besides constitution Nepal is a party to various binding International Human Rights instruments that focus on freedoms such as of conscience and of various civil concerns. The Nepal Treaty Act of 1991 indicates the primacy of International Treaties over national laws. This view therefore calls for the need that the government should analyze some of the provisions of international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights. In such international instruments are some provisions that must be considered in light of the Nepalese focus on citizens' religious rights and issues of minority groups. To mention a few, article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 provides for religious and other minorities to be able to enjoy their rights of culture, religion, or even use of own language. Also, article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in teaching, practice worship, and observance, either alone or within a community in public or private. Yet the Nepalese constitution prohibits conversion. Such gaps need to be filled in order to provide a secularization process that will produce good results for the minority citizenry.

#### **4.1. Politics and Religion**

Before touching further on the above, we need to put into perspective what we mean by religion in this discussion. Commonly and less complicated, religion is used to refer to world religions in the likes of Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity and others. However one can observe that there are many other groupings that carry some linkages with the above but are not considered religions in the same respect. That then widens the scope of religion. Take for instance fascism or Marxism, or even magic. Scholars like Moyser tend to see religion in terms of more of three related themes that characterise religion religious experience. These are transcendence, sacredness and ultimacy (Moyser 1991). Transcendence refers to perception of forces that are from beyond this world, otherwise referred to as the supernatural. These are powers that are superior to and higher than one's own consciousness. Such awareness tends to be in view of the

subjects way of life and convictions, thus their social wellbeing cannot be viewed minus this realization. Consequently the awareness tends to have influence on one's political experience and may become visible when facing collective public order issues are in the picture.

Another distinguishing term is sacredness, which refers to aspects that are considered particular, uncommon and demanding reverence, comparison to aspects that are considered common and not reverent, religiously speaking. These sacred aspects are identifiable and preserved through religious beliefs. The identification of sacred things and how they relate to the rest of the world is seen through religious beliefs. Ultimacy refers to the consideration of certain aspects of life as of 'super ordinate purpose and significance' (Moyser, 1991: 10). With this sense those aspects will control human activity and therefore remain socially and politically influential. From this angle, our usage of the term religion will therefore be inclusive of all those movements that are classifiable under the three main defining terms stated above. This is mainly the case when the paper makes reference to the global context. From a Nepalese perspective religion does not need to be this complicated since for Nepal religion has been largely light of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. In light of the Nepalese context therefore religion will be easily determined by the main religious movements that are in the fore.

In the foregoing discussion elsewhere (4.2.), I made mention of Kumar Sen's view that the choice of secularism or not secularism was in Nepal among other linked to the choice of a political system. Those who preferred secularism their political system choice was republicanism and federalism, while those who were in support of monarchy were in support of state sponsored religion. This notion speaks to us of the connection that is there between politics and religion, and given the background of Nepal's secularism history it is necessary that we explore this angle further. George Moyser reflects this notion well in his book "Politics and religion in the modern world". Moyser starts by showing how religion remains part of human experience in the modern world, and that it clearly resurfaces in many parts of the world. This is to an extent that secularization or modernization has not been successful to force religion to the background. He makes a point that religion and politics keep crossing each other's paths and that they are intrinsically related.

He observes that historically Church and state has for a long time been taken to be what it means when one speaks of religion and politics. I will make mention of three instances to highlight this point. In the United States, the constitution reveals a close link between religion and politics in that its symbols and values have a clear religious provenance. It can be boasted there that the democracy of the United States was founded upon religious (in this case Christian) foundations. The second instance is in the Middle East, where especially Judaism and Islam are particularly central to all political activities going on in the region. It cannot be disputed that the Middle East political landscape is strongly shaped by religion to greater depths. Conflicts that have since taken place in the region, governance systems that have been employed are all shaped by religious philosophies governing the nations in the regions. Nepal is the last instance to be mentioned. The History of Nepal reveals that Hinduism was the main player in both political and religious spheres since the forefathers built the nation. This development led to Hinduism being the sole religion under which the State was operated. All other religions were minor and undesirable and unsupported by the State. Even after secularism was declared, reports are still live, of the preference given to Hinduism and the role it continues to play in government's activities as well as the governments clear failure to be completely divorced from religious affiliation.

Such connections are even seen in political parties that are either founded upon religion or are influenced by religion in one way or the other. Religious influence in the political parties is also observed in form of ideologies that are advanced by such political parties. Religion is clearly influential in politics. Moyser observes that even the masses in political systems have religion as one of the factors leading to activities like voting preferences and participation in protests and violence (1991:7).

It is important at this point to recognize that in traditional cultures, politics and religion were not seen in such dualism where the two are distinct spheres. The separation of the two has been mainly courtesy of modernization. This means therefore that the societies that have been less touched by modernization especially in the global south, religion and politics remain connected, and some protest against this duality seen in the civilizations of the global North. Religion is

therefore an indispensable factor that to an extent can and does influence human activities, thereby arguing for the relationship between religion and politics.

#### **4.1 Analysis And Discussion**

The analytical procedure in this section will be in form of content and discourse analysis. The analysis will engage with the information presented above and in light of the analytical tools as well as the theories adopted in the paper, following the themes created from the above data.

##### **4.1.1 The Question of Origins**

We begin by asserting the question of the origins of Nepalese secularism. The concentration of power in the hands of Monarchy within the Hindu majority rule brought about suppression of the minorities, ethnically and religiously. With passage of time discontentment arose that gave rise to the attempts to force political change that eventually paved the way for democracy. This rise of this discontentment motivated the demand for secularism. Struggle for religious and ethnic freedom since the 50s had not clearly put secularism in the picture, until the coming of the Maoist insurgents who in their demands for change included the need for a secular state. The suppression of religious freedoms seen earlier did make the minority religions and the minority ethnic groups' fight for their freedom but even with the dawn of democracy between 1951 and 1962 secularism was not in picture yet. If this reading is correct, it is foundational to understanding the perceptions that are live in the Nepalese sectors, among religious groups, ethnic groups and political groups.

##### **4.1.1 Secularism In Nepal**

The adoption of the concept of secularism in Nepal means that a long process of interpretation and sense making started. Being an imported concept, it is necessary that the Nepali society brings out its own version and understanding within its context. I would like to agree with Letizia that the interaction between the government and various groups in a number of ways provides an insight to what the public makes sense of with regard to secularism and such processes can help to shape the practice within the Nepalese context. What then can we at this point regard as the Nepalese views on secularism? The general western view of secularism as the division of Church and State, changes view when it comes to Nepal because the nation has had a

different background. For the Nepalese who are not Hindus, secularism will simply mean the abolition of Hindu domination and provision of equal religious and Ethic rights. It refers to the abolition of Hindu primacy, and the opportunity for all religious groups to receive equal recognition and a step towards inclusiveness. Letizia in her research indicated that there were categories of people whose take on the subject matter differed dependent on their background. The main issue was that they sought freedom. The freedom being stated refers to freedom of the individual and groups, freedom to select and change one's religion (although the constitutional right of religion is restricted to following of ancestral religion). These are readings present among Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, as well as politicians of minority groups and minority ethnic groups.

A Hindu proponent would consequently generate different view. The extreme Hindus as indicated by Letizia would only propagate fears and branding of secularism as a means to empower other communities and weaken Hindus. For some Hindus secularism is only meant to purify Nepal of the bad aspects of Hinduism and promote the positives, not the total loss of the control of Hindus. They argue that their religion already offers notions of tolerance with other religions and thus secularism for them would refer to the spirit of tolerance towards other religions (Letizia, 2012, Letizia, 2017, Stephens 2007).

#### **4.1.1.1 Secularism In Practice**

I have included this section in order to analyse what the above sentiments with regard to secularism as understood by the groups involved. For Nepal, it remains a fact that 80% of the population are Hindu. Their understanding of secularism would be more practical in the daily matters of the country. It also brings conflict in the sense that the meaning of freedom that the minorities envisage will play back on the emotions of the dominant group in one way or the other. In practice the freedoms stated above have implications that may prove difficult. Two will be discussed. First, freedom for Muslims would mean having the right to practice their own religious ideologies including the *Sharia law*. Consequently this would spark conflicts. It is indicated that secularism brought about reactions from the Hindus who feared that the Muslims and other groups would bring disaster to the Hindu community and strengthen the other communities.

For Christians the freedom means the right to expand through proselytizing, right to cow slaughter, both of which are an insult to the Hindu community and cannot be void of conflict. The Nepalese constitution still prohibits conversion and for the Hindu masses that is interpreted as part of a Christian conspiracy that is aimed at alluring illiterate people with economic gains to convert them and to promote cow slaughter. Such sentiments are taken as promoting violence in the communities. Letizia confirms this in her research (2012 and 2017). What this means is that Hindus see the coming of secularism with both negative and positive views. Some are extreme while others are moderate. Although some groups within them were in support of secularism, this momentum did not continue in the period thereafter. The moderates argue that there are advantages that Hinduism can still provide which secularism has disrupted. Adhikary (2010) sees advantages that were taken away by the declaration of secularism. He argues that the declaration removed a binding force, that kept Hinduism and other minorities bonded, and as such brought an identity crisis among various communities of Nepal,” writes his argument is that the change to the secular state was not for the benefit of the nation as a whole because the Hindu identity appealed to more than one ethnic grouping. The Hindu identity was, and is, taken as an agency which was, and is, shared by the vast majority of ethnicities in the country. He argues that secularism has brought the communities, groups, and castes in the crossroads, where traditionally accepted identities are not simply working.

The paper earlier referred to conspiracy theory (Chapter 3), which was defined as an unofficial explanation which is deemed fallacious by others while the ones holding it deem it as the real truth. The term has a derogatory connotation, implying that the appeal to a conspiracy is based on prejudice or insufficient evidence (Bayford, 2011). The conspiracy sentiments are hatched by the Hindu proponents who have a different reading of secularization. They view Christian and Muslims’ actions in light of secularism and think that the very coming of secularism was influenced by a western conspiracy that sought to promote their religions in Nepal. It translates into Nepal’s to loss of identity and culture. To respond to such thoughts there is need for much effort and political will over a period of time.



The complexity of this situation can be appreciated when conspiracy is understood as more than simply a conspiracy. Conspiracy viewed as deliberately orchestrated acts, pre-meditated and acted out mostly by a group of people, can mean that the twisting of the facts or the presentation of the arguments in the conspiracy is meant to produce something. As an intellectual construct, aimed at giving a sense of order to events (Barkun, 2016), conspiracy theory can be used as a tool to fill gaps created in the process of explaining the lived experiences with regard to secularization in Nepal. In line with this thinking, it is believed that some small and hidden group can attempt to manipulate events to affect a view of events that is desired. This is also highlighted by Popper who sees conspiracy theories as a way to explain a social phenomenon by suspecting and discovering people who might have planned to bring the phenomenon in order to achieve some hidden or known agenda. A conspiracy theory can be local or international, focused on single events or covering multiple incidents and entire countries, regions and periods of history. In Nepal the opponents of secularism and even some of those that were initially in support have advanced a reading that there is some sort of a Christian conspiracy within the issue of secularism. They read it as a conspiracy to allow proselytizing. For Hindus, secularism offers religious minorities the right to convert and eat cows, and the antithesis is that Hindu purity means protecting cows and banning conversion as such the former kingdom is a haven for the fundamentalists. Secularism is seen by those who advance this discourse as undermining national unity and national identity, as well as leading to disrespect and communal violence (Letizia 2015).

Hindus in Nepal want to maintain a pride of Nepal as the 'last land of the Hindus', or the only Hindu country in the world, which in turn conflicts with modernism. The accusation of the involvement of Christianity in Nepal as a conspiracy to undermine Hindu practices and national identity is an interesting argument (Sajha Sawal: Episode 402. BBC Media Action). However, although some quarters in the country consider the accusation as a true reflection, the two issues stated, the matter of proselytizing and the question of a change to (instead of undermining the) national identity are obviously part of changes that would take place in light of secularism. The argument here is that in a secular state one may want to exercise freedom with regard to certain issues like cow eating. Elsewhere Moslems and Jews do not eat Pork meat and the controversy of contravening such direction is no small matter as evidenced in Judaic or Islamic dominated

places, or wherever Moslems are. Usually violations or poor adherence to the taboo is taken as grave religious insult or cultural transgression. For instance in India, the meat of swine was thrown on mosque steps and the action provoked major inter-communal rioting. Planes to the Middle East even of modern European companies announcement is made plainly informing travelers that the meals provided on board contain no pork. Not only that, but also, in Spain, the ritual of public slaughter of pigs, the *matanza*, is practiced to symbolize the resistance of Christians to the Muslim occupation. The ritual is a modern element even in the formation of Spanish religious and cultural identity (Lobban, 1994). These elements are reflected in Nepal and India in an opposite manner, in that the demand is not based on abhorrence of the animal involved but on the basis of its sacredness. Despite the difference in the motivation behind the prohibition, the demands made by the Hindus are similar to those made by Moslems and Jews, non-adherents must subscribe to dietary laws that are imposed in such religions.

All over the world there is proliferation of Halal butcheries to allow the Moslems only purchase meat that is considered religiously acceptable. Such trends question whether in demanding that the cow should not be eaten (by Hindus), and in demanding that the cow should be viewed as any other animal (edible by the non-Hindus) one would only be making demands that are in line with their view of religious freedom. This becomes a dilemma for the State in Nepal. By demanding equal rights of treatment and the right to practice religion in Nepal, it may send different messages to the parties involved. On the one hand, for the Hindu, practice of religion includes observance of the sacredness of the cow, and seeing its slaughter provokes them. For the Christian it also means they should be allowed to eat whatever they desire and in the process controversy resulting from how 'freedom to practice religion' in the secular constitution is perceived.

Related to the foregoing discussion is also the issue of identity crisis resulting from the declaration of secularism. The question of identity cuts across the religious and ethnic arguments of the representative groups in Nepal. While the Hindu want to maintain religious practices that preserve their identity, such practices like the prohibition of the cow slaughter may be viewed as disturbance of other religious minorities like Christianity whose identity can also be seen light of observance of their religious practices which may include not viewing other animals as sacred.

Obviously secularism should give birth to a different scope of identity in view of the multi-religious nature of the new national setup. Opponents of secularism argue that it leads to an identity crisis. Some scholars argue that:

“secular nationalism responds to the same needs for collective identity, ultimate loyalty, moral authority that religion has traditionally responded to and that this similar response makes secular nationalism de facto a religion” (Clarke, Powell and Savulescu 2013: 19)

Conceiving secularism with suspicion may result from a sense of competition that may arise when nationalism is viewed as religion according to Clark Powell and Savulescu. Religion has some descriptive facets that nationalism does not fit into, despite that religion and nationalism fight as major sources of legitimacy in society. Perhaps this competition is what leads to resistance against and rejection of secular nationalism. The matter touches the aspect of identity in that both nationalism and religion relate to identity issues. The argument of identity crisis spearheaded by the Hindu conservatives should be seen in light of the resultant plurality of the community resulting from the adoption of secularism. It can be argued that collective identity is an indispensable result of multi-cultural setup of our societies. But just as is the case, that in conspiracy, “what we see is not what we get” (Dean 200, 43), the negated view of this matter as a conspiracy does not present a typical sense of reality.

To conclude this section, we refer to the question of religion and power highlighted in the theory chapter (3.4). Rangdrol (2007) and Almond et al. (2003) argue to the effect that resistance to secularism is signal to the power of religion which is seen as in control of social political and even economic events in most states in the world. There is continued controversial practice with regard to states that claim to be secular claimant states where religion fundamentally continues to perform complex, multiple roles and functions in the said societies Almond et al: 2003:9). As stated earlier, that nationalism and religion are both major sources of legitimacy in society, they compete in power. As a result the religion that wielded power in the pre-secularism finds it difficult to let go of the control of power. It is argued that despite the claims of secularized and privatized societies, religion in such states has fundamentally continued to possess power by performing complex, multiple roles and functions in the said societies” Almond et al: 2003:9). These kinds of roles of religion are clearly visible in the countries that are secular like the United States, Europe including South Asia. These arguments indicate the place of power of religions

which as indicated has not entirely been removed from the social constructions around the globe. The question therefore is to what extent has Hinduism relinquished its power, and how much does the state stand independent of the influence of religion in its affairs? We are yet to witness complete independence of the state from religion in Nepal as is asserted by Letizia who argues that despite the transition to secularism:

“‘anti-secular laws’ such as those criminalizing cow slaughter and proselytizing have not been repealed. Neither have gods left the political sphere. Much of the symbolic and ritual apparatus of the monarchy has passed unchanged to the secular republic. Rituals that featured the king’s public presence continue to be financed as state affairs, and the president of secular Nepal has appropriated the king’s ritual role at important Hindu festivals” Letizia 2015: 2).

It is also necessary to consider the question whether Hinduism needs to completely vanish from the state influence. The model seen in other states shows that religion still takes part in affairs of the State, although there is fundamental independence in frontline involvement in state affairs. Should it be expected that Nepalese dominant religion be part and parcel of the state affairs? Letizia is of the view that there is more the State must do in to enhance its independence and promote equal treatment of the citizenry regardless of their religious affiliation. On other Hand, Adhikari feels that there must still be strong presence of the Hindu religious identity within the state functionaries for the sake of national identity. It is therefore appears that gaps are present in both aspects, and branding the demands being made by the proponents of secularism as a conspiracy is both correct and incorrect.

#### **4.1.2 Nepalese Secularism And The Global Context**

I highlighted earlier that Nepal’s context needs to be read differently. This argument questions the views that that processes of secularization are universal and that they are irreversible. This is taken to be problematic, and scholars of this view argue that secularization process is neither linear not irreversible, nor uniform in kind and rate (Bruce 2011; Voas 2008). All socio-cultural processes, secularization inclusive, in the current multi-dimensional sense—cannot be considered as independent from their valid contexts. The common sense in understanding secularism in the global context is seen in three main angles as earlier shown by Casanova. Secularization as *decline of religious beliefs and practices* in modern societies; the *privatization*

*of religion* and as the *differentiation of the secular spheres* (state, economy, science) are the three readings common to the global experience. Applied to Nepal, it is difficult to apply the understanding of the process of secularization as decline of religious beliefs, wholesale. It may be the case in urban areas but may not be the case throughout the whole Nepal. We noted earlier that for some religious minorities secularization means freedom to practice the very religious beliefs we talk of. Of course we cannot deny that there is a notion of decline of religious beliefs especially in light of activism against retrogressive religious practices, but it does not necessarily refer to decline of religious practices. It is also not possible to talk about decline of religious beliefs when religions like Christianity have seen in secularism a chance to propagate the gospel, and increase their faith base. The next notion of secularism as privatization of religion is dual faceted. I understand that the Nepalese community despite the declaration of secularism still considers cow slaughter as wrong; the constitution still regulates conversion, and the government still takes part in some Hindu festivals. Nepal has not realized privatization of religion. Whether it is still tenable, is subject to discussion. The majority of Nepalese are Hindu, which makes it difficult to talk of complete privatization especially in rural areas.

Scholars recently have noticed that religion is coming back to the fore and as such are calling for de-secularisation of secularist and modernist categories (Casanova 2009) when describing contemporary religious developments. Terms like ‘de-secularisation of the world’, the ‘return of religion’ or the ‘reprivatisation of religion’, signifies that the world is witnessing a reversal of a previous process of secularisation. It does not necessarily mean a return to the Christendom for the West, but that religion is back into the public domain. There is need to coin new concepts and to find ways of accommodating religious claims in liberal institutions (Habermas 2008, Casanova 2009; Rosati 2011). It has been seen that modernity does not necessarily mean removal of religion from the public sphere, or view of secularism as a public space free from religious arguments, religious symbols and religious groups (Casanova 2011). This is why Asad argues that secular space does not need to “*be thought of as the space in which real human life gradually emancipates itself from the controlling power of ‘religion’*” (Asad 2003: 192)

Asad’s view is that religion must not be seen as something that operates in a confined space such that it does not influence the political domain. The concept of secularism, says Asad relates to

the natural and the social conception of the world, and challenges associated with it. Although the two are thought of alien to each other, Asad argues that historically the secular has had a part to play in generating religion and in some instance the secular was part religious language. This argument is true for Europe where religion especially Christianity has been part of society in the pre-modern and secularism seen as having invaded the religious in the modern period. Ultimately the two cannot be dismissed as he also argues that the concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion (Asad 2003: 191).

From a Nepalese context it cannot be termed as return because secularism is a new phenomenon which is yet to take root. What can we say instead? It does not mean that Nepal does not need secularism but rather that it calls for a comprehensive local and global reading to come up with a secularism that is not Western but Nepalese. Whatever this can be, it would require aggressive and extensive campaign to sensitize the communities. The gaps in perception noted in Letizia research, and her view of the need for a contextual moral and legal reasoning process in order to free conception of secularism from the rigid application of a Western presents the necessity of a proper and collective efforts to reduce adverse fundamentalist reactions and mistrust between communities (2012: 96). This campaign can assist dispel the conspiracies that cannot be verified and that whatever communities understand secularism to imply, must be based on thorough knowledge by the masses of what the state wants to promote and at the same time dispel unnecessary and unfounded fears.

The last notion of secularism as *differentiation of the secular spheres* refers to emancipation from religious institutions and norms, where religion loses power of institutions. In the western secularism religious institutions lost power in direct political control but I do not think it is right to say they lost control altogether when there are still institutions of religion that work, like schools and hospitals for example in Germany and the United Kingdom. Moyser in 'Nepal, religions' power over institutions can be seen especially in Hindu institutions that the State has not taken control of. To some extent we have experienced this notion in that the Hindu power hegemony was drastically reduced after the monarchy was overthrown.

Thus, religion cannot be said to be on the completely out of the public sphere, as it was seen in the secularization theory. The position, that modernity and religion do not mix, that the

significance of religion especially that of Christianity would definitely be eradicated has not been the case. Religion continues to play great part in lives of the people politically or otherwise (Bargava 1998; Casanova, 2011; Casanova 2009; Casanova 2010). The best way out is that nations and regions need to find contextual reading in their implementation of secularism. The type of religion we are talking about leads us to consider Moyser's view before closing this section. Moyser spoke of religion in terms of transcendence, sacredness and ultimacy. The Nepalese practice of religion in the main religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam these three defining characteristics are all active which speaks of the reality and the depth of religious practice in Nepal.

#### **4.1.2.1 Learning From The Neighbouring India**

In India, secularism is challenged by religious and traditional laws governing social facets like marriage, divorce, inheritance childcare and divorced women. The legal requirement is that there be a uniform treatment and application of laws irrespective of the religious or caste affiliations, and an ambition indicated in the laws that there will be a replacement of personal laws of the religious groupings by a universal civil code (Stephens 2007). This background raises questions. First the linkage between personal, religious laws available among communal and the cross-cultural applicability of the "religious" paradigm. The western sense religious versus the secular may interact, but this may not necessarily apply to the Indian context, neither does it apply to the Nepalese context. Differentiating religious matter from secular or legal matters proves unfavourable for those religious communities that see such dichotomies as not valid.

Among the Hindu, Islamic, and Buddhist traditions in Nepal and India religion and secular matter are not so much considered to be separate categories. As a result there arises tension between traditional power and law and modern secular approaches adopted in the Indian context. Adhikary (2010) observed identity crisis that is experienced in light of secularism in Nepal. While this is also observed in India, I am not convinced that identity necessarily fails in diverse society. We can therefore talk of diverse identities which will require the Hindu proponents to make sacrifices and adopt a more diverse and inclusive approach.

Furthermore, in 'the Crisis of secularism in India, Needham and Rajan (2007) argue that the tension that has arisen in light of the secularisation process is a manifestation of a tension which

is true to democratic secularism. It is a tension between the need for national unity and the desire to preserve and allow for religious difference. This challenge is faced by not only India but also other democracies that have evolved from state-sponsored religion like Norway and Nepal. Through the electoral politics, secular democracies tend to place the majority in a position of dominance over minorities such that in the quest for national unity religious minorities are left with few but undesirable choices. Either they relinquish their distinctive identities or risk being seen as traitors, spoilers, or foreigners. Such a development can be seen in the Nepalese secularization process and was highlighted in 4.4.1 above. Nepal has over 80% of Hindus owing to the dominance of the Hindu nationals in political leadership. In a secular state all members whether in majority or minority are meant to be offered leveled ground for them to participate in the nation building and advancement of their cause. These are the rights that are provided in both national and international statutes. However it is reliant on the actions of the majority and lays the responsibility on the state to ensure equal treatment compel all actors to consider how the minorities must relate to the State in a productive and safe manner.

Among the many hot issues in India conversion is another centre of secularization politics. From the Indian context, the interaction between Hindus and Christians in India is not without roughness and intriguing turnings. Scholars relate the matter in light of 'Literacy and Conversion in the Discourse of Hindu Nationalism'. Anti-conversion polemics are very much intertwined with literacy and education. The Nepalese context is not exempted from this complexity. In 1998, Amartya Sen won the Nobel Prize in economics. Sen's view of development that all forms of human deprivation such as hunger, malnutrition, and illiteracy should be brought within the purview of public policy was criticized by prominent Hindu Nationalists. They insisted that, the development of literacy in India as a fundamental freedom would necessarily require the help of NGOs, which would mean greater Christian missionary investment and presence in India, and this would eventually lead to more conversions. The argument sends signals of a more complicated platform that arises from the linkages of secularism and developmental themes of states like India and Nepal. The above story exposes the unease which is present among many Hindu nationalists that would view development and cultural integrity is unpleasantly juxtaposed with one another. This is especially the case when the said development is advanced by foreign organizations. Such suspicions were also highlighted in view of the Nepalese context. Such a



view that development would necessitate conversion can be viewed from two angles. From an elitist view the poor and illiterate are considered as gullible and easily manipulated, who are incapable of choosing a religious faith and the influenced by material gains to support a particular faith (Needham & Rajan, 2007; Letizia 2012, Adhikary 2010). Some quarters in Nepal are of the view that the secularism is used as a means to increase presence of foreigners and consequently they advance their agenda of conversion.

The other view is that conversion entails a kind of cultural violence, especially when considering the history of colonial conquest in Africa and India, as well as the foreignness of Christianity which also happens to be linked to a long history of missionary education in India which focused on the people that are on the lowest level of the social ranks, a people to whom the State was unable to reach out and provide decent education, the tribal groups and the lower castes in rural areas. The argument here is that on the one hand literacy can help to offer cultural change by offering to those who possess it a new "form of access to the world" (Needham & Rajan, 2007: 346). On the other hand it brings out the question of legality of conversion. Do the missionaries who are responsible for the developmental changes have freedom to advance their faith preferences, or this would be viewed as preying on the people's poverty and illiteracy? In Nepal many foreign organizations have been operational and this question of conversion being a hidden agenda and abhorred by many Hindu nationalists has caused some original supporters of secularism to rethink their position. The conflict over conversion both in India and in Nepal are based on the Hinduism's distaste against Christianity. Hindus are the ones that have contended against the practice of conversion because this is mostly from Hinduism to 'foreign' religions especially Christianity. However as observed by Sarkar (2007), although Hinduism is deemed as a non-proselytizing religion, it is difficult to assert this in view in the case of India of Buddhists that have relocated to Hinduism. Not only that, but also Southeast Asia has non-Indian who have become Hindu. It is also difficult to completely suggest that a religion does not have converts. Most religions if not all in the world have sense of conversion either through intermarriages or personal choice to shift the faith affiliation. The matter of conversion if properly analyzed by the concerned can just be a matter of perception not necessarily a policy.

Commenting on the Indian context, Bhargava (2010) speaks of the notion of ‘principled distance’, which refers to flexibility in looking at the matter of state involvement or lack of involvement with religious establishments. He argues the secular outlook of the state means that it is institutionally separate from religion, but it does not mean that it has to be separated from engagement with the religious establishments. However, he is of the view that this engagement can only be at the level of legal and social policy. As such law and social policy determines the level of operation of the state, but also provides the platform on which the state can meaningfully challenge the citizenry in view of religious liberty and equality of citizenship as it engages with religion (Bhargava 1998: 536; 2010: 87-96). From this perspective the state welcomes religion as a resource and this in return will not mean complete divorce of the State from engagement with religion (Bhargava 2010: 88). However implementation of such approaches would sound non problematic at the theoretical level but could require procedural approach as it would take longer for the dominant groups to lay aside their conceptions and adopt a tolerable approach to effect equality of other minority religions.

## **4.2 Conclusion**

The present chapter has highlighted a number of aspects in the Nepalese theory and practice of secularism. It is impossible to bring out a secularism that is uniform to the rest of the world because of various contextual challenges. Nepalese secularism is challenged by the diverse communities and their varied perception with regard to secularism. The various ethnic and religious groups have varied readings and perceptions of secularism depending on their context. It requires a lot of listening to the public discourse to generate and produce what constitutes secularism in Nepalese context. It requires interface approach by the authorities in sensitizing the masses as well as avoidance of leaning too much to the western concept and practice of secularism. There is need to produce a unique form of secularism that can work in light of the resurgence of religion in the public sphere, and in light of the diverse religious populations that Nepal is blessed with. This paper offers some of the approaches and actions that can be advanced by the government and other agencies in order to bring about a secularism that is practical for Nepal and that can foster tolerance among the religious and social groups, in its final chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **5.0.CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This paper sought to examine the perceptual reaction following the transition of Nepal from a Hindu nation to a secular nation. It has highlighted how secularism is interpreted in light of religious-socio-political context; and how events inside and outside of Nepal eventually resulted in adaptation in of secularization of Nepal. This concluding chapter has three major components. The first component will highlight a summary of the research and the research findings, with the research question in mind, to ascertain whether the research question is successfully addressed or not. The second portion will highlight the major contribution the paper has made to the knowledge base of secularism in the country; and show how the theoretical lenses in light of conspiracy theory, religion and power, secularization theory are used to map the perception of the public in Nepal with reference to the concept of secularism. The final segment will highlight some recommendations following the discussions in the paper, and suggestions for further study.

#### **5.2 Summary Of Research And Findings**

##### **5.2.1 Summary Of Research**

This study looks at the process and progress of Nepal from a religious identity and state sponsored religion to a multi-religious country or a secular country as to discuss the way the public received and interpreted the transition, following which the paper sought to interpret this development. The first chapter provides the general understanding of secularism and seeks to put the study into context, by providing the national and global contexts relevant to the research question. The second chapter shows that the paper relied on secondary data in assessing the empirical situation. It also highlighted the reliance on discourse and content analysis as the analytical tools in the paper.

The third chapter has revealed the main theoretical frameworks that the paper depended on. In this chapter we have the conspiracy theory it was stated that there can be situation where a phenomenon is given multiple explanations, where apart from the official explanation of a phenomenon a conspiracy by certain actors and often political in motivation is believed to be

available (Goertzel 1994). In this case the unofficial explanation is deemed fallacious by others while the ones holding it deem it as the real truth, explaining why events are the way they are. In most cases, the conspiracy becomes something that can mainly be believed while lacking actual production of evidence. The paper indicated that secularization in the context Nepal is highly attached to a variety of assumptions and suspicions, for instance that secularization was not demanded by citizens, but that some forces acted out of their own interests and suspicious cause to activate it. Attached to this were the religious rejection of secularism and the connection of religion to power. Secularism may be viewed with suspicion, competition and consequently resistance would follow. It is also argued that the western nature of secularism is understood as coming in the shell of religion itself, in the name of Christianity. They claim it is because the west is less secular as it claims and they still run “Christian Governments”. Examples given in support of this argument among others include the fact of some parties in Europe who use Christianity in their names (Clarke, Powell and Savulescu 2013:19). Religion and power are interconnected. Following this, some scholars are of the view that resistance to the secularization could be fuelled by strong religions who do not want to relinquish power. The reaction against secularism is clearly understood as resistance power of “Strong Religion” and that fundamentalism is strong and tremendously rich in many contexts, drawing various social structures and political atmosphere of many global contexts Rangdrol, 2007). As a result, religions tend to the vocal part in reacting to secularism.

The second theory has highlighted was the theory of secularization. Secularization in this regard is understood as a situation where human history has found itself passing through a series of distinct stages, in which the growing influence of the state and science impact the power and relevance of religions, which are gradually and irreversibly undermined, and weakened (Gorski in Dillon (Ed), 2003). It is argued that secularism has been interpreted by various scholars over the ages. Among others it was seen that Casanova interprets secularization in light of three dimensions, namely: secularization as the *decline of religious beliefs and practices* in modern societies; as the *privatization of religion* and as the *differentiation of the secular spheres* (state, economy, science). The paper related this to understand what part described the Nepalese context. The question of context was also highlighted with some detail. The theory states that social, political and cultural circumstances in modern societies are necessary to be considered

when we think that the secularization theory should be complemented by alternative approaches of sociology of religion. From this angle, secularization theory is simply a starting point to structure the thoughts on the relationship between religion and society. Beyond this, it is necessary to consider context. This argument questions the views that that processes of secularization are universal and that they are irreversible. This is taken to be problematic, and scholars of this view argue that secularization process is neither linear nor irreversible, nor uniform in kind and rate (Bruce 2011; Voas 2008).

The chapter also included section of rejection of secularism. It observes that secularization of the East has been the slowest in the history of secularization, such that to an extent scholars can talk of resistance of secularization in recent years. This is mainly due among others to the variation of context. It is observed that the western way of enlightenment of which secularization is part, has been exported to the post-colonial societies. In this respect, Nepal remains exceptional given its non-colonial history. None of the western colonial powers acted on Nepal officially to colonize it. However, it is observed that Nepal despite not being colonized it is conceived that it has always been positioned by neighboring India. Furthermore, the Western secularism is understood to refer to freedom of faith; equal citizenship to every citizen regardless of religion and separation of the religion from the state. However, in India and Nepal despite being a secular constitution the government continues to regulate and administer temples, universities and monasteries with significant amount of funding to operate them (Acevedo 2013).

In Chapter Four the paper has dwelt on the discussion of various materials that present data on the global context of secularism, as well as its development and perception in Nepal. This chapter is where the main issues are argued, cantering on context and interpretation of the meaning of the concept based on Nepalese perception and in light of theories discussed in chapter three.

### **5.1.1 Summary Of Findings**

Findings suggest that Nepal became secular with the cooperation between secular and religious nationalist. The religious minorities in the country and influence from non-Hindus must have taken part in turning Nepal into a secular nation. While at the very beginning both Hindus (some of) and minority groups were in support of secularism, recent work has shown that at the

moment minorities in the name of Muslims, Christians, Buddhists are positive to the secularization of the nation. A greater percentage of over 80 % is still inclined to support Hindu identity and opposed to secularization. This is the case because secularism for these religions means religious freedom. Nepal minority religions have cultivated certain grievances which supported by the non-Hindus groups mainly 'Christian actors' from different parts of the world. Their view of secularism therefore is strongly attached to context. The weak economy, political instability, post conflict transition and constitutional vacuum fabricated a huge gap among the citizen and political parties, some stronger 'secular' powerbroker have carefully traced the track in adopting secularism in Nepal. The issue of context therefore has been highlighted in the findings. A number of circumstances showed that in Nepal secularization may not be viewed in the same way as it is in other parts of the world. One of the issues is the above point that the background to Nepal tells us that other religions see secularism simply as the demise of Hindu religion. For some, secularism was above all else a move against the monarchy, in the hope of removing the religious basis of his power, and not necessarily a specific project of the society.

It has been argued that support for secularism or rejection of it is attached to a particular form of government being preferred (republicanism/federalism or monarchy). Secularism is mostly identified with Republicanism and Federalism forms of governance. The supporters of these two forms are likely to be in support of secularism which justifies the identity of the Nepalese state with secularism. The preference of Hinduism is constituted along a lengthy history or Nepal's Hindu dominance, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Coming from Monarchical governance with the Hindu predominance Nepal's history reveals a strong lean towards Hinduism and therefore the identification of the state with Hinduism. The recent developments that have seen Nepal turn into a democracy can therefore consequently lead to the adoption of secularism (Sen: 2015).

The paper has dwelt also on the type of secularism that Nepal wishes to be identified with. It has been found that there is still lack of clarity as to what kind of secularism is desired, and that and the concept is obviously still in the making. The constitutional provisions for instance are still insecure as the reference to secularism is not well established and as indicated by others it is implicitly carried (Adhikary 2010). There has been a lot of discourse within the public in a number of platforms where the idea is subjected to discussion. This can be seen in incidents

between the government and religious devotees, through court cases, as well as anti-secular campaigns and demonstrations that have been advanced. The advantageous part is that such incidents which provide a means for the public to engage in the debate on the matter of secularism and relations between the state and religion; they can be used as a way to look into the processes through which secularism is taking shape in all its complexity. This can also provide the State with data to help shape secularism to a consumable taste for the Nepalese context. Due to the fact that many actors took part and that each advocate had their own reasons, for a nationally agreed paradigm to appear it will be more complex and will require deliberate effort from the authorities to engage with the public.

The paper has also highlighted the applicability of the global interpretation of secularism to Nepal. It was argued that already the global practice differs between states. Some aspects of secularism for instance can work in the United States yet not in Europe and vice versa. It highlights the complexity of secularism, and calls for the need to critically assess the contextual applicability in order to reach significantly national levelling on the concept. The practice historically in Europe has been moving between the classical and the most recent view pointing to the decline of religious beliefs and practices among the European population. For Europeans, the two notions are observable, the “decline in the societal power and significance of religious institutions, and the decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals” (Casanova 2006: 8; Hackett 2005). These notions have been exposed to criticism and revisiting in the past two decades. Whereas in western contexts secularism points to rejection of domination of religious institutions and symbols, (and this is traceable in the spread civilization; the rise of Communism, modern nationalism, modern economic process or the "dynamic of industrial revolutions); in Nepal it was found that a struggle continues to exist over religious symbols like the cow and the state control over religious shrines. The State has not been able to completely be divorced from religion. Hindu events like the pilgrimage financial aid from the government of Nepal may be expected. Moreover, within the premise of Singh Durbar the Central Hajj Committee (CHC) receives Hajj subsidiary from the government and foreign states. Not only that but also there are a number of ways in which the Nepalese government is accused of siding with the Hindu religion

The paper also mentioned the complexity of secularism both for Nepal and other global nations. It has been argued that in traditional cultures, politics and religion were not seen in dualism where politics and religion are distinct spheres. The separation of the two has been mainly courtesy of modernization. This means therefore that the societies that have been less touched by modernization especially in the global south, religion and politics remain connected, and some protest against this duality seen in the civilizations of the global North. Religion is therefore an indispensable factor that to an extent can influence human activities, thereby arguing for the relationship between religion and politics. Since Hinduism is not only a religious practice in the Nepalese society but also entangled with socio-cultural aspect of day to day life. This study reveals that no actors who were involved secularizing Nepal are in a position to answer what kind of framework is going to address the societal fragmentation, post Hindu identity. Unification of the population seems to be facing challenges. Hindu activists are blaming politicians as traitors and recent intra-party debate whether Nepal should revert to Hindu nation shows Nepal has a lot to think about. The ideological confrontation and ongoing is leading to aggression.

The research question is about the Nepali public perception towards the concept of secularism as well as the opportunities and challenges therein. The above discussion has shown the main parts of the discourse in the public to do with the connection of religion, governance system and the choice for or against secularism. The challenges encountered among others include the resistance that secularism is faced with, failure by the State to enact certain laws that can decisively indicate freedom of the minority groups, and the conspicuous presence of the State in religious affairs of the dominant religion. It is therefore the opinion of the researcher that the research question has been addressed.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

I wish to start with noting that the diversity of the world's cultures makes mutual respect and harmony among human beings and peoples difficult. From the point of view of one culture, another culture may seem unattractive and/or immoral and/or impious. This also applies much to religions. The fight in Nepal centers much on religious domination. However, the destiny of the Nation is purely in the hands of the citizens. We can either fight or we can reason. Since fighting is both intrinsically undesirable in normal conditions, and generally unsuited to establishing



correct principles, there is no proper way forward other than reasoning together. This reasoning together should be allowed to take shape both randomly and spontaneously in public debates as well as deliberate moves by the State and other actors to involve the masses from the grassroots in order to shape a better future. There is strong need for the society to perform a patient examination of conflicting ideas with as much skill and as possible and with as little prejudice as we can manage. It was stated earlier in the discussion that some sections of society are interested not in advocating for total rejection of Hindu Identity but rather reform of what they deem repulsive and primitive practices within Hinduism although they were initially involved in advocating for secularism. Such quarters need to be involved in dialogue with the advocates of secularism for proper interface aimed at reducing tension and fostering dialogue.

It has been observed that although the majority of the Nepali public has not embraced the secular state as yet at the national level, the minority of the people who support the move to secularism is also substantial, and they are held to be in the majority at some of the sub-national levels. These are groups belonging to Buddhists, Muslims, Kirati, Christians, the hill indigenous group, supporters of UCPN (Maoist), and small leftist parties. Thus, a significant segment of the Nepali populace is in support of secularism. This calls for the need to listen to the public opinion which can significantly contribute to the issue of secularism. Considering the fact that in public opinion, supporters of secularism also tend to support republicanism and federalism, while supporters of a Hindu state tend to support the monarchy and a unitary state, there is need for deeper engagement among all parties involved to consider the future of the Nation. These issues are deep issues and therefore there is need for an extensive research and engagement with the citizens throughout the country. Of course this engagement can build on the fact that since Nepal has already been declared a federal republican state, the country's secular identity can be argued as being more justified, as it is already in motion. There should be attempts to consider the worries and issues argued by the opponents and proponents of secularism and generate a secularism that is unique to Nepal respecting the worries of the parties.

One of the issues that need to be addressed is the issue of identity. The Nepali National identity promoted before 2006 was based on cultural monopoly of the Hindu high caste hill group. It was not based on inclusiveness, pluralism, and multiculturalism. This mono-cultural value based

identity was at the expense of the suppression and exclusion of other groups. With the coming of secularism plurality and multicultural values need to be nurtured by the society. There is need for constitutional clear provisions to be followed by acts in various sectors that promote multicultural inclusive identity, and envision a Nepal's democracy that is truly pluralist and inclusive.

### **5.3 Suggestions For Further Study**

The present study is limited to the issues of understanding of secularism in the Nepalese context. The study has reveals a deep need for more research into matters that are focused on the future of the Nation. With the rising discontentment with secularism, where it is observed that even the groups that were involved in advancing secularism are now opposed to it and are showing loss of momentum. The rising tensions influenced by the proponents of state religion, is a clear indication that declaring Nepal as secular is only a part to the solution of ending religious and cultural domination. It is therefore necessary to engage into deeper research aimed at assessing the effectiveness of secularism in addressing the concerns of both the minority and the majority religious and cultural groups and determine the framework of secularism that addresses these angles adequately.

Secondly in light of the conspiracy suspicions being hatched in the course of discussions there is need to engage into research that exposes the suspected influences by involving the groups that hatch such theories so as to ascertain the relevance of the suspicions and address their impact or dismiss their reality and put the matter to rest. The suspicions are that the western governments are involved in granting monetary favors to certain quarters within the country in order to promote one religion, and abolish the Hindu Identity. I am of the view that such a research can ably assist to reduce the suspicions and lower the tension in a bid to contribute to a smooth discourse leading to a proper determination of the future.

Lastly there is need to engage in further research to establish the positives and tolerable aspects of Hindu culture, and the cultures of other religions that can be compatible with inclusiveness, exposing them to the public. It is a fact that Hindus remain the majority in Nepal and if there can be a way to motivate them to the positive aspects of their religions and those of the others; it will greatly contribute to the discourse within the public domain and eventually promote the spirit of tolerance and multiculturalism.



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